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THE WING OF AZRAEL.

CHAPTER XV.

BETROTHED.

SIR PHILIP, noted throughout the county for his dashing equipages, drove over to the Manor-House in the very sprightliest vehicle which it could enter the heart of man to conceive. A brilliant pair of high-stepping, spirited chesnut horses, always stylishly on the point of running away, came spanking down the avenue, "Youth at the helm" and Lady Dendraith at the prow. Nothing would persuade the old lady to take the box-seat on her husband's many chariots; it made her nervous; so she always took the post of "Pleasure" in Etty's famous picture. Philip, on the wings of love—as Mr. Sedley jocularly put it—had already arrived, and he and Viola, with the radiant proprietor and his wife, were assembled on the doorstep to welcome the visitors. Sir Philip, waving his whip in gala fashion, drew up the prancing chesnuts,

sprang down, helped "the old lady" to alight, and broke forth into loud expressions of satisfaction at the news.

The two fathers shook hands with the utmost effusion, exchanging boisterous jocularities, and between them making so much noise that the dashing steeds very nearly took fright and ran away down the avenue. Only Philip's dexterity prevented the calamity.

"Well, my dear, I suppose you won't refuse to kiss me *now*," said Sir Philip, patting Viola on the back.

She made no resistance to the sounding salute of her father-in-law elect, but she did not receive it over-graciously.

She was quiet and cold, and treated Philip with extreme politeness in return for his graceful and flattering homage.

However, the others were too preoccupied to notice this, especially as Viola received Lady Dendraith's hearty expressions of pleasure with answering warmth.

"My dear, there is no one I would rather have for a daughter-in-law than yourself, and I assure you this is to me the best news I have heard for many a long day!"

The Dendraiths stayed to lunch, and heartily enjoyed themselves, Sir Philip undertaking to "chaff" the betrothed couple in his usual graceful fashion, to Viola's utter bewilderment and dismay.

Philip took it coolly; he owned to having risen an

hour earlier than usual that morning, in order to arrive in time for breakfast at the Manor-House; admitted, with a "What would you?" and a shrug of the shoulders, that he had stolen Viola's portrait from her aunt with all the audacity of a thoroughgoing housebreaker, and generally disarmed his adversaries, by making more severe jests against himself than any one else was able to make against him.

He ate a most hearty luncheon, and drank largely of the champagne that Mr. Sedley brought out in honour of the occasion. He made no secret of his joy, but that was clearly because he chose to take the company into his confidence. He even paraded it in a half-serious, half-jocular manner. It did not beam out of his eyes and suffuse his whole being, as it might have done in a man simpler, and less skilful in self-management.

Fortunately for Viola, even after the departure of the radiant parents, she managed to avoid a *tête-à-tête* with her betrothed. Her bewildered, unwilling, almost somnambulistic repetition of her father's words on the night before, had suddenly—as a whisper may start an avalanche—brought down upon her head a series of consequences for which she was totally unprepared, and which she had not even realised.

The congratulatory visit of Philip's father and mother

had startled her into the consciousness that a great step had been taken, never to be retraced.

The position threatened to become very difficult, especially as Philip was far from pliable, and as Viola felt a certain undefined awe and even fear of him, partly on account of her sense that she did not understand him, partly because she felt the merciless grip of his powerful nature underneath the smoothness of his manner. In dancing, the most perfect lightness and grace is the outcome of strength, and this was what Philip's suavity suggested.

He, on his part, had not found the day unsatisfactory, in spite of Viola's rather repellant manner. After all, shrewd as he was, he failed—where so many shrewd men fail—in the interpretation of female character. He thought Viola was simply a little shy. Perhaps a man's views about women are the crucial test of his own character : if there is in him the slightest taint of vulgarity, *there* will it inevitably betray itself.

Whether through the education of his sister's influence, or by the help of some innate sense denied to average men, Harry Lancaster had managed to steer clear of the shallow but popular dogmas which are so often repeated, and with so much *aplomb* that they come to be recognised

in literature and life almost as axioms. Many men, he said, while rejecting the worn-out superstitions of dogmatic religion, still cling to the superstitions of society with the simple faith of little children. He had often laughed at Philip's cynicism, on the ground not that it *was* cynicism, but that it was merely the echo of other men's echoed ideas.

Philip denied this. If ever a man was justified in being a cynic—especially about women—he was that man.

He admired Viola Sedley (as he frankly admitted) because she was so entirely unlike the women of society, who had imbued him with a rooted contempt for the sex.

"In proportion as they are clever they are bad," he said. "Safety lies in dulness. Talent is agreeable to amuse one's self with, but stupidity is the thing to marry. That is the conclusion that my experience has led me to, though one does not always put one's theories into practice, mind you. Come now, you agree with me at heart, though that sister of yours won't allow you to say so. If you had a few thousands a year, my dear fellow, your ideas of human nature would panoramically alter, sister or no sister; a most stupendous piece of scene-shifting! By the bye, I have news for you—no, not about myself just at present—there is a chance of a friend of yours coming to settle in this neighbourhood. Can you guess who it is?"

"Mrs. Lincoln?"

"Right!—the divine Sibella! I wonder how you guessed. You know my father has a small house not far from Upton, and he has offered it to Mrs. Lincoln at a low rent, being glad to get it kept in repair. The mother is opposed to the arrangement; she doesn't think the 'Divinia Commedia,' as I call her, a proper person. I tolerantly represent to my parent that the separation was *his* fault, but, of course, without effect. My father is dazzled with the 'Commedia's' *beaux yeux* (though he denies it), and declares that she is an injured and immaculate creature, deserving all sympathy. You know there was some scandal about a fellow, —I don't remember his name"——

"Mrs. Lincoln shrugs her shoulders at the scandal," said Harry.

"But my mother shakes her head. You seem ready to be her champion, as of old. Well, she wants backing. Upton will not have her at any price."

"*Tant pis pour Upton.*"

Philip laughed.

"How do you suppose Lady Clevedon will act in the matter?"

"I doubt if she will call," said Harry. "Mrs. Sedley herself is not more strict in her notions of conventional

propriety. My cousin always speaks of Mrs. Lincoln as 'that woman,' which does not look encouraging."

"The feminine anathema!" exclaimed Philip, laughing. "How hard women are on one another!"

"Who is it says that a woman in the pillory restores the original bark to mankind?"

"Good!" cried Philip; "and the feminine 'yap, yap,' how sweet it must sound in the ears of the condemned!"

"Mrs. Lincoln once said to me that where a woman blames, a man simply laughs disrespectfully, and gets credit for more tolerance while committing the greater cruelty."

"She is very keen," observed Philip.

"She also says that, take it altogether, there is nothing a proud woman has more to dread than the approval of society."

"One of her many paradoxes. The divine one is clever, but unbalanced. If she had played her cards well, she might at this moment be held up as a model of all the virtues."

"Yes; but she does not value such bubble reputation," said Harry. "Upton need not imagine that she is waiting in her best frock, with beating heart, for it to call upon her. Ten to one, she won't notice whether she is called upon

or not. She comes here to be quiet, not to be called upon."

"To 'wait till the clouds roll by,'" said Philip. "Well, that's piece of news number one; now for piece of news number two. Can you guess it also?"

Harry gave a visible start.

"Anything important?" he asked.

"Not, perhaps, as regards universal history, but as regards local celebrities,—very much so."

"Local celebrities?—Mrs. Pellett has dismissed the pupil-teacher for wearing pink ribbons on Sunday."

"No; try again?"

"Something very surprising?"

"Nothing ever surprised me more, I can assure you," said Philip, with a laugh.

"Mrs. Pellett has been wearing pink ribbons herself."

"No; something more astonishing than that."

"Mr. Pellett recognised her when he met her unexpectedly out walking?"

"No—worse than that."

"Arabella has joined the Salvation Army?"

"Good Heavens, no! What next?"

"I am exhausted. Caleb Foster has ceased to allude to Kant, and has nothing to say about Socrates; Mrs. Pellett

has attempted the life of the Queen, and has been discovered with an infernal machine concealed about her person; Mr. Evans has given up trying to get subscriptions for a new spread-eagle lectern (that 'abominable idol' condemned by our ancestors); and Mrs. Evans ceases to take interest in the school-children's plain needlework. Now, I will guess no more; human ingenuity can go no further."

"This is embarrassing," said Philip. "I hoped you would have relieved me of the duty of making announcement of my own engagement."

"*Engagement!* You, the despiser of women, the 'old bird' not to be caught with chaff,—you who have kept a firm front against battalions of seasoned veterans! Philip Dendraith, I blush for you!"

"I rather blush for myself," said Philip, with a shrug; "'He that getteth up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare,' you know. Well, it can't be helped; a man in my position has to marry some day, and I don't think Viola will make the bondage unbearable—nice disposition, you know."

"Very," said Harry dryly. "Accept my congratulations. Is the engagement"—he stopped abruptly and cleared his throat—"is the engagement publicly announced yet?"

"Scarcely. We do not consider anything public till Mrs. Pellett has been confided in, under pledge of secrecy. The matter was only settled last night; this morning the four parents have been passionately congratulating one another, and I imagine by to-morrow 'society' will be in possession of the facts."

"To-morrow 'society' will enjoy itself," said Harry.

When he returned to the Cottage, Mrs. Dixie, who had been holding a *levée* during the afternoon, showed traces of her royalty still clinging to her. Her ancestor with pink cheeks and a blue coat, reposed majestically among family lace at her throat.

"Well, mother," he said, kissing her, "tired out with the pomps and ceremonies? 'Uneasy is the head that wears a crown.'"

"My son," said Mrs. Dixie (who might have made her mark in provincial melodrama had she not been called to higher things)—"My son, your mother wears no crown but that of sorrow."

"Poor mother!" he said, stroking the white hair affectionately; "there are many kings and queens so crowned."

Mrs. Dixie did not appear quite to relish the idea of a multiplicity of rival sovereigns.

"Not many have been tried as I have been tried;

every luxury, and a private chaplain—and oh! what a man your father was, Harry!" exclaimed the widow ecstatically.

"Quite a luxury, I am sure," said her son.

"Upright and honourable as the day, respected wherever he went,—and *such* religious principle! The good he did among the poor too, and the dreadful places he used to go into—to get his rent—and always cheerful and contented. Your dear father was thankful to Heaven, Harry, whatever befell him!"

"About the luxury, of course," said Harry; "but was he also thankful about the 'sunset?'"

"It was a great blow to him, of course," said Mrs. Dixie; "but, as every one remarked, he seemed even more of a gentleman in his downfall, than he had been in the time of his prosperity."

"They always are," said Harry, "and, of course, nothing but death could sever the Riversdale-Clevedon connexion."

"Nothing but death," repeated Mrs. Dixie, with solemnity.

Adrienne, coming into the room at the moment, smiled and nodded to Harry as she took up her work, quietly listening and observing, according to her custom.

"We were talking about Death, Adrienne," said Harry; "no, not at all in a depressed manner; were we, mother? Quite the contrary."

Adrienne looked up keenly.

"Were you singing his praises?" she asked. "You remember the fable of the man who invoked Death, and when he came did not receive him cordially?"

"No one ought to call upon a man in his bare bones," said Harry; "it's not decent. The proprieties of life should be observed in all circumstances."

"Ah! your father used to be so particular about that," Mrs. Dixie put in piously; "he always said that if a man couldn't take the trouble to dress himself carefully when he came to see his friends, he had better stay away."

"That's exactly what I imagine the man said to Death when he arrived with the wind whistling through his ribs and half his teeth out," observed Harry.

"I never saw your father with his teeth out in my life," said Mrs. Dixie, "nor with his ribs anything but properly covered. He was an example to us all, was your poor father."

"So you often used to say to our poor stepfather in the old times, mother," said Harry, with a laugh, and an affectionate touch as he rose and left the room.

Adrienne watched him narrowly, and after he was gone she answered her talkative mother entirely at random.

When the little party of three assembled for the evening meal, Adrienne thought that her brother was looking ill, and he seemed more absent-minded than usual, though talking spasmodically in his accustomed vein.

"Harry, you are not well," she said when they were alone together in the garden, Mrs. Dixie being left to her evening nap in the little parlour.

"Am I not? What makes you think so?"

"Your appearance—your manner"——

"Oh, this accursed reputation for buffoonery!" he exclaimed impatiently. "If one is not perpetually standing on one's head and stealing strings of sausages, *à la* pantomime clown, one must be ill or depressed. Is there any more awful fate imaginable than that of the man who must be always in good spirits?"

"My dear boy, I don't want to bother you, but it distresses me to see you look as you do."

"Oh, the ease and joy of the mourner with the broad hat-band!" exclaimed Harry.

"If you are miserable, dear Harry, can no one help you?"

He was silent.

"Can you not confide in me as you used to do in the old childish days? Do I not know how bitter is the sorrow that is borne alone? Harry, there is nothing on earth I would not gladly do for you. Don't you believe it?"

He pressed her hand, but turned away, with a man's dislike to the exhibition of feeling, especially in the presence of a near relative.

"Nothing more has happened to me than has happened to hundreds of better fellows than I am," he said at last, after a long pause.

A thrush was warbling from an old elm-tree behind the garden; a song sweet, clear, and plaintive, bringing the tears into Adrienne's eyes as she watched the set face of her brother. His profile was towards her, and he leant upon the little gate leading from the garden into the meadow, where a cow was still contentedly grazing in the twilight.

"I am afraid the grief of other 'better fellows' does not make yours easier to bear," said Adrienne in a low voice.

"You don't think the eels get accustomed to skinning?" said Harry.

"No, I don't, dear."

"You show real intellectual acumen," he returned fantastically. "Very few people understand that grief can be neither more nor less than one person is able to endure; that twenty sorrowing people represent really no more sorrow than is contained by the one greatest sorrower."

"O Harry, you are talking at random!"

"No; I am quite serious. I have been thinking this out to-day. You cannot add pain to pain, your pain to my pain, and ours to the pain of Mrs. Pellett, for every organism is a world in itself, and its events cannot be mingled with the events of other microcosms, as if they were continuous. This truth carries with it many issues quite contrary to our ordinary ways of thinking, as a little reflection will show."

Adrienne looked at him, as he leant calmly on the gate, and sighed. She wished that he would confess and bewail his fate, instead of philosophising about microcosms and "continuous sorrow." Did ever any human soul get real consolation out of philosophy when the hour of sorrow struck? Adrienne thought not. On the contrary, this keen, clear habit of mind must heighten the pain and enlarge its horizon. It was a misfortune to see too clearly and too far.

If only Harry would be less reserved! But the custom of treating everything in a light, half-humorous spirit had become so ingrained that he was unable to throw it off. Few things in life are more tyrannous than the *rôle* that gradually comes to be attached to us. Only among absolute strangers can we at last fling off its weary weight and move our limbs in freedom.

CHAPTER XVI.

WITHOUT MERCY.

No sleep did Viola have on that first night of her engagement. Her dismay at the thought of it increased with every black lingering hour as she lay tossing on her pillow, wondering at times if she were under the thrall of a terrible dream. It was all impossible; she could not go on with the engagement; surely Philip himself could not be in earnest about anything so preposterous. He had said that he would ride over in the morning, about ten o'clock, and when the time drew near Viola was seized with a panic, and flinging on her hat and cloak she rushed into the park, and plunged into the deepest recesses of the underwood in order to escape detection in case of pursuit. She began to feel an actual terror of the man to whom she was betrothed. As she drew near to the park boundary, not far from the unused grass avenue—the great elm avenue which had never lost its fascination for her—she heard angry voices in the wood outside, one of them unmistakably Philip's.

Through an opening in the trees, she presently saw him standing, with his left hand on the bridle of his horse, while with his right he thrashed the animal with all his enormous strength. The creature was flinching, and tried to escape from the heavy blows; his glossy sides were bleeding and foam-flecked, and with every savage stroke of the whip he gave a desperate plunge.

Harry Lancaster, who had just come up, was angrily remonstrating.

"How much longer are you going to keep this up?" he asked. "Can't you see the creature is half-dead with pain?"

"One would think the beast was yours from the interest you take in his welfare," said Philip, with a sneer, and using with renewed violence the cruel whip.

"Are you a man or a fiend?" exclaimed Harry. "I will look on at this devilry no longer—you are literally slicing the miserable beast with that whip of yours? Will you leave off, or must I interfere?"

"Interfere at your peril."

Harry's answer was to lay hold of the handle of the whip, and to try to wrench it from the other's grasp.

Philip was forced to let go the bridle, and the horse started off at a gallop down the road, followed by a curse from his master.

"Meddlesome fool!" Philip muttered as the two struggled by the roadside for several minutes, silent for very fury.

Viola looked on in terror. *This* was the man whose honeyed phrases had been whispered so softly in her ear! This was her future husband! Well had that instinctive fear been justified! And yet with its justification, it seemed to vanish. Viola could not feel frightened of a man who might be capable of physical violence towards her. That thought roused all her own latent fierceness and her instincts of revenge; her timidity was exorcised. It was the cool, suppressed, self-mastering power which had awed her in Philip Dendraith. Now she actually longed to do battle with him herself, on behalf of the ill-used animal: intense indignation deprived her of all fear.

Thrusting aside the boughs of the trees, she forced her way through a gap in the oak paling and stood with glowing cheeks before the two struggling men.

"Mr. Dendraith," she gasped, "you are a cruel, wicked man. I knew you were cruel; I felt it; and now I know it beyond all doubt, and I won't marry you, I *won't* marry you;—and I hope I shall never see your face again as long as I live!"

She was trembling with passion, and her voice shook and gave way at the last word, as if she were going to burst into

tears. But her eyes were quite dry, and were flaming with anger.

Even Philip had been a little disturbed by this sudden apparition and outburst. But he quickly recovered his self-possession, and adroitly managed to put Harry in the wrong, as he handed him courteously the disputed riding-whip.

"Allow me to confess myself vanquished—by the presence of a lady. The whip is yours."

Harry laid it across his knee and snapped it viciously in two. The pieces he threw over the hedge into a turnip-field. Philip laughed.

"Although the whip was a favourite one," he said, "I don't grudge it, seeing the intense enjoyment you appear to derive from its destruction."

"The next time you wish to chastise your horse, you can procure a more effective instrument. The Russian knout, for instance, does double the work with half the effort;—however, I wrong you in supposing for a moment that you grudge any trouble in the good cause."

"Surely this is sarcasm, or very like it," cried Philip. "Rather good in its way too—irony all through; quite a Russian knout sort of business; good deal of *lead* in it, don't you know."

"I thought something heavy was suitable in the circumstances," Harry retorted.

"Good again! But, alas! while I linger here, listening to these lightsome sallies, our bone of contention is rapidly emigrating."

"Perhaps you had better go and gather up his scattered fragments," said Harry.

"Perhaps I had, and I can explain matters to you, Viola my love, when I return."

"I don't want any explanation," she answered; "everything has explained itself."

"So much the better; it is a pity to start with a misunderstanding. *Au revoïr.*" He smilingly raised his hat, and strode off at a gradually quickening pace down the road.

Harry looked at Viola, and their eyes met.

"I hope you are not angry with me for my part in this affair," he said at length.

"Angry! I am most grateful." Her voice was still trembling with excitement, and had an ominous break in it. They turned instinctively and walked on towards the elm avenue, and towards the house. Just as they were entering the avenue, on the summit of the little hill, Viola suddenly stopped. At this point the sea was visible.

"Listen," she said. "Do you hear how the waves are

breaking to-day? When I was a child I used to fear that sound, for I always fancied it boded some misfortune. Don't you hear how it moans?"

There was a startled look in her eyes, and as she spoke she stretched out her arm seawards, and then raised it above her head, standing so, like a prophetess gazing upon coming woe.

"The waves bear you no ill-will, I am sure," said Harry, in a tone that he used only to Viola; "you who are almost a daughter of the sea."

"Yes," she said, still with a deep excitement in her voice; "from my childhood it has sung to me it's slumber-song and drawn me towards it, so that the longing for it became a pain. I was forbidden to go to it, and that made the longing worse."

"Poor child!"

"Day and night, summer and winter, I have heard it; sometimes sighing very softly, and sometimes full of lamentation;—I think its great sweetness comes from its great strength. But oh! when it is stirred to its depths, its song is full of misery so profound, so awful, that no words can possibly tell of it,—no words that ever human being spoke."

Harry looked at her in amazement. What did this girl

know of such misery? She must have terrible capacity for suffering, or she could not interpret the voices of nature after so mournful a fashion. And this was the promised wife of Philip Dendraith, a man who knew not what the word "pain" meant, who was capable of no feeling much keener than discomfort or chagrin, except the feeling which prompted in him such actions as had led to the quarrel of the morning.

It was cruel, shameful!—the iniquitous work of a dissipated old spendthrift who wanted to save himself from the consequences of his own sins, and of a pious, narrow-minded woman, ready—for all her maternal professions—to wreck her daughter's whole life on behalf of her own miserable piety! Harry had fancied, before to-day, that Viola was at least a willing victim, but the scene of the morning dissipated that idea and excited in him all sorts of wild fancies. Fate seemed to thrust him into the position of champion to this friendless girl—worse than friendless, indeed, for who is so lost and alone as a woman under the protection of those who betray her trust, and take advantage of her obedience?

"Poor child, with the mournful prophetic eyes, what can I do to save you?—I who cannot face the thought of the future without you"——

"I am afraid you have been unhappy," he said aloud, referring to her last strange words about the sea; "perfectly happy people do not hear such things in the sound of the waves."

She was silent.

"I fear," he went on presently, "that you did not take the somewhat oracular advice which I gave you at Clevedon the other day."

"Would to Heaven I had!" she exclaimed. "I tried, but what could I do? And besides"——

That *besides* meant more than Harry could fathom, or than she would explain.

"If there is anything that I can do to help you, you will tell me," he said earnestly. "If I may presume to speak on the matter of your engagement, I must tell you that I think you have a perfect right to break it off after what you saw this morning. Such an exhibition of temper is unpardonable."

"Oh! I can't marry him; I can't, I can't!"

"Then for Heaven's sake don't!" he exclaimed, "It is terrible to think of!"

"Oh! if you knew how I am placed!"

"I do know—forgive me—and that is what emboldens me to speak. However important may be the considera-

tions which urge you to this marriage, they sink into nothing in comparison with the—awfulness of marrying with such feelings as you have towards your betrothed. You don't know what you are doing! Your whole life is at stake, and my whole happiness! Forgive me,—what can I do?"

"Have it boiled for supper with parsley sauce," rang a voice through the trees, and at the same instant appeared the stalwart form of Geoffrey with his fishing-rod over his shoulder, shouting directions to the gamekeeper to take to the cook, on the subject of a trout that he had caught weighing twelve pounds.

"Boiled happiness with parsley sauce!" echoed Harry, with a rueful laugh.

"Holloa, you there!" Geoffrey called out. "Bet you haven't had as good sport as I have this morning! Look here!" and he swung his bag round and displayed the spoil.

"That fellow with the knowing eye gave me a lot of trouble; artful old dodger; but I hooked him at last,—my twelve-pounder I have sent in to be cooked for dinner. Holloa, Viola!" exclaimed Geoffrey, suddenly looking from her to Harry; "why, you have got the wrong man!"

His look of bewilderment was so comic that Harry heavy-hearted as he was, burst into a shout of laughter.

"But why is this?" persisted Geoffrey.

"'Cos t'other man's sick,'" growled Harry.

"Well, to tell you the honest truth," said the tactless youth, "I wish you *were* the man."

Harry coloured.

"No such luck," he said jestingly.

"If t'other man, being sick, were to die," suggested Geoffrey, regardless of the feelings of his companions, "why, then you might step into his place. I'd give my consent and my blessing,—and I'd ring the wedding-bells. Ha! hist! the enemy approaches!"

Philip was coming down the avenue towards them at full speed.

"I've captured my Bellerophon, and taken him to the stables, where he is now enjoying a wash-down and a feed of corn. His frame of mind is enviable, I assure you."

With the want of insight of even the keenest men where a woman is concerned, Philip treated Viola as if nothing had happened, and as she behaved, as far as he could see, much as usual, he thought her anger had blown over.

Harry and Geoffrey had to walk on ahead and leave the other two to follow; for Philip managed in such a way as to give them no choice.

"At last we are alone, dearest," he said, stopping and

facing his companion, "and before we go a step further we must ratify our betrothal in due form."

He put his arm round her, but she sprang back.

"What! still angry about that affair of the horse? What can I do to earn forgiveness? How shall I sue for my dear lady's pardon? I am all submission and repentance. Surely she will not refuse me one little kiss if I ask for it very humbly."

"Mr. Dendraith, I want you to release me from my engagement."

"*Viola!*" His cheek flushed, and his lips set themselves in a thin hard line. "Do you know what you are saying?"

"Only too well!"

"This is a blow for which I was totally unprepared," said Philip. "I hoped that you returned in some measure my boundless love for you,—but if so small a thing can turn you—— O Viola, this is bitter! Can I not win your love by any means? It looks as if—if I thought that fellow Lancaster had succeeded where I have failed"——

A certain expressive tightening of the lips indicated his meaning.

"You are mine," he said, taking her hands in his firmly; "you have no right to withdraw from our engagement."

"You would not have an unwilling bride!" she exclaimed.

"I would have *you*, Viola."

She tried to loosen the grasp of his hands, but in vain.

"You have given me the power; you cannot take it back."

"I entreat, I implore you," she cried passionately.

He flung away her hands.

"Plead so for any other thing in the world, and see how I will respond,—but this—Viola, you try me too much."

"Put yourself in my place—but, ah! you cannot."

"Do you so hate me, then?" he asked bitterly.

"Yes; at times."

He winced. "Blow after blow you inflict without mercy!"

"I had a lesson in that this morning," she said.

"That accursed horse again! O Viola! my love, be merciful and be just. At present you are neither. You fling me away for one fault, accepting no apology." He stood looking at her for some seconds gloomily. Then a light came into his eyes and a fixed look about the mouth.

"Why do I woo my betrothed? She is mine, and she shall not escape me. Some day you will thank me for it,

Viola; you shall be the happiest woman in England against your will."

"And if I did become so, you would remain unjustified," she said.

"But not unrewarded," he returned, with a smile that haunted her long afterwards.

CHAPTER XVII.

ADRIFT.

When Viola, trembling and excited, related the events of the morning to her mother, Mrs. Sedley appeared much dismayed; not, indeed, at the conduct of her son-in-law elect, but at her daughter's way of looking at it.

"Dearest, you must not judge a man's character by his behaviour towards animals; the most tender-hearted of men, after all, find their greatest pleasure in slaying the dumb creatures over whom God has given us dominion. Men are all like that, and though I agree with you that Mr. Dendraith was wrong to lose his temper as he did, I cannot think that it would justify you in withdrawing from your engagement. The family would regard it as a mere pretext or a deliberate slight; and think of your poor father!"

Viola turned very pale, and sank powerlessly upon a chair.

"The engagement is by this time made public," Mrs.

Sedley continued; "the whole neighbourhood is discussing it; really it is not possible, dearest, to draw back now. If your husband never does anything worse than beat his horse rather over hard, I shall not fear for your happiness. Surely you are not afraid of him?"

"Not *now!*" said Viola, with a gleam in her eyes.

"You can use your influence to induce him to treat his animals more humanely; he is devoted to you, and I have no doubt he will do that for your sake. Gentleness, patience, and obedience in a wife can work wonders."

Oh! marvellous faith that remains unshaken after a lifetime spent in proving its futility!

Philip did not leave Viola much time for considering matters or for maturing her opposition. Although much piqued by her conduct, he put it down to mere girlish caprice. At the idea of giving her up he laughed. When had he ever given up anything on which he had set his heart and his will? He had yet to learn that he could be beaten by a timid, ignorant, parent-ridden girl!

He came again to the Manor-House next morning, and behaved as if nothing had happened. Viola seemed tongue-tied. She treated Philip with a cold ceremony which not even Mr. Sedley could mistake for a satisfactory bashfulness. When Sir Philip patted her on the cheek and

attributed her demeanour to this cause, she looked at him with steady wide-opened eyes, and then gave a sad little flickering smile. She made no attempt to repudiate the accusation. Old men had their own hereditary notions about girls and their ways, and it would take an enterprising girl indeed who should undertake to upset them!

Lady Clevedon's quick eye saw that something was wrong.

"Harry," she said, "what's the matter here? Is there a lovers' quarrel going on, or what?"

"Do you want to know what is going on?" said Harry. "I will tell you. Andromeda has been chained to the rock, for the gods are angry, and must be appeased by sacrifice. And the monster is about to devour her, so that Andromeda is having a rather bad time of it just now—that's all."

"My dear boy, she's in love with Philip; you are talking nonsense."

"She may have been so at one time, but she does not wish to marry him now. Some one ought to interfere. A man has no right to marry a woman against her will; it is monstrous!"

"Pooh! What's a woman's will?" asked Lady Clevedon.

"That *you* ought to know."

"Oh, I was meant to be a man."

"You are all making a great mistake about your niece," said Harry, with renewed energy; "every fresh event will strike the hidden springs of her character, and I am convinced she will develop into something that her family will not like, if this moral coercion is persisted in. For my part, I hope she will. She tries to tread in her mother's footsteps, but her nature is too passionate; she cannot do it, for which Heaven be praised! Once she is fully roused, the artificial, imitative self which she shows at present, will burn away like so much tinder."

"You are either very imaginative or very penetrating," said Lady Clevedon.

"Time alone will show which," he returned.

Perhaps it was the strange look in Viola's eyes which had suggested the prediction. The weather being stormy, the sound of the waves was more than usually distinct, and she seemed to be listening restlessly to that ominous moan which had haunted her childhood with presage of misfortune.

Having promised to go with his mother on a round of calls, Harry had to return to Upton early, and Philip followed his example. He found Viola very unresponsive, and thought it prudent not to force his society upon her till her fit of ill-temper (as he called it) had passed off.

In the late afternoon, when his servitude was over, Harry announced that he was going for a walk, and did not know when he might be back. He said that he panted for a sight of the sea.

Very fresh and delicious the sea-breath was when he reached the shore, and stood watching the waves rolling in, and the foam sweeping to his feet. He drew a deep sigh. The freedom of the place and the wonderful sea-freshness gave new audacity to his impulses. Hesitations were overwhelmed, as children's sand-castles by the sweeping of a wave.

It was scarcely a surprise, only a great joy, on looking round at some instinctive suggestion, to discern the white fluttering garments of a figure which he could not mistake, even at this distance. It was Viola talking to Caleb Foster, and pointing to a boat that lay on the beach. So intent and eager was she, that Harry's approach remained unnoticed till he stood beside her. Then she started and coloured vividly.

"Ah! you are much wanted here, my friend," said Caleb. "I have been explaining to this young lady that she can't manage a craft of that size (with a will of her own too) on such a day. The waves are strong, and it may come on to blow harder any minute."

"I have often been out with Geoffrey, and understand all about it," Viola said hastily, and colouring once more.

"Were you really going to attempt it alone?" cried Harry in dismay. "What madness! Presentiments do come true sometimes. I felt I should be wanted here to-night. Let me come with you, if you wish to go; soldier as I am, I consider myself no bad seaman."

He held out his hand, and Viola, seemingly half-stunned by the frustration of her own design, allowed herself to be led into the boat.

"The centre of gravity is improperly adjusted," said Caleb; "a little to the right, Miss Sedley, if you please. You will find the *Viola* (as I call her in compliment to yourself) a brave little craft, but she wants humouring, like the rest of her sex."

"Like them, she answers to the touch of intelligence, and rebels against coercion; isn't that it, Miss Sedley?" asked Harry, with a smile.

She shook her head. "I don't know," she answered. "I don't know anything."

"Give a shove, Foster," said the young man. Together they laid their weight against the boat and launched her, and as she grated off the beach Harry sprang in, and the *Viola* darted eagerly forward through the surf into deep

water. Harry gave an exulting wave of the hand towards the shore.

"Good-bye, old shore!" he cried. "Good-bye to etiquette and formality, and all the gags and muzzles of our crazy life,—good-bye to everything but the winds and the deep sea! There's an exordium for you!" he added, with a smile, as he sat down and took the sculls.

"I won't ask where we shall go to," he went on; "I will just go on at haphazard. This movement is glorious, isn't it? Look at those waves! How they curl, and how they are green! as the French would say. Now I am going to forget that you are Miss Sedley, and think of you as some sea-spirit—consolidated like a nebulous young world—out of sea-spray and ocean-winds. Then I may say what I please to you, may I not?"

Viola smiled. She did not seem surprised at his buoyant, fantastic talk; the poetry of the scene had attuned her mind to his. Her pulses, too, beat fast as the boat swung out to sea; she, too, thrilled at the sight of the heaving miles of green water. She leant over the boat-side to watch the sculls dipping with even recurrence into the deep, and her face seemed to grow every moment more beautiful as the old bondage was loosened, and the half-freed spirit fluttered out,—as a panting bird

from its cage, into the sweet bewilderment of sudden freedom.

Her hat, which threatened to be blown off, had been discarded, and she had no covering for her head but her own thick hair, which was fluttering in the wind.

"I need no help now to believe you are the spirit of the sea!" exclaimed Harry. "You only want a crown of sea-weed to make the resemblance perfect."

He caught a spray as it floated by and handed it to her; and she smiled and blushed and laid it dripping among the coils of her hair.

A wild, poetic beauty was in her face; all trace of the "young lady" had disappeared; her womanhood was uppermost now.

She was like some dark-eyed sea-queen, daughter of the Twilight; some mystic, imaginary figure, with all the loveliness of ocean and of evening in her eyes.

Once past the current that swept round the distant headland on which stood the lonely ruins of Upton Castle, Harry slackened speed, and, after a time, he let the boat drift out to sea with the wind, which was blowing off shore.

He felt that this would be one of the memorable days of his life, one of the few moments of almost unearthly joy that come now and again as pledges of a possible

Paradise, realisable even in this bewildered world—according to his creed—when self-tormenting mortals shall at last have groped their way thither through the error and the suffering and the wrongs of weary ages.

"I said that I was going to speak openly to you to-day," Harry began, "and I feel that anything else would be ludicrous and even unfair to you and to myself. This is no time for hesitation. Our whole lives are at stake, and I *must* speak out."

Viola did not look startled; nothing would have startled her to-night; she was in a waking-dream.

"When you came down to the beach this evening I know that you were very miserable; it was a desperate impulse that made you long to be afloat on the waters, and with it was a secret hope—secret from yourself—that they would swallow you and your troubles for ever."

She flinched from his earnest gaze, and coloured, while a look of pain came into her face.

"I do not say this in detection or reproach, but in sympathy," Harry went on hastily. "I know that you are being driven to despair, and it is no wonder such thoughts overcome you."

"I know it is very wrong"—— Viola began.

"For Heaven's sake, talk no more about 'right and

wrong,'" he exclaimed; "those words have been used against you too long and too successfully. You must assert yourself and resist."

"It is too late; and besides"——

"It is not too late, and there is no 'besides,'" cried Harry.

"My father, my mother"——

He gavé a fierce gesture and exclamation.

"Do they not know that the slave-trade is illegal in England?"

"I do not understand—I"——

"No; you are brought up not to understand; the thing couldn't be done otherwise. O Viola! let me save you; there is nothing I would shrink from doing; there is nothing that *you* should shrink from doing. You do not realise your own position."

"But how can I escape?"

"Ask him to release you.'

"I have done so."

"And he refuses."

"Yes."

Harry was silent for a moment.

"You have not the courage to go to your father and say that you will not be forced into this marriage?"

"I could face my father, but not the consequences for my mother. He punishes *her* for my misdeeds."

Harry set his lips. "How securely they bind you through your own pity and compunction! It is quite masterly. Loyola himself had not a more subtle method of playing the potter with human nature."

"My mother thinks it impossible for me to draw back now," said Viola. "I told her about the beating of the horse."

"Strange beings that good women are!" he exclaimed. "O Viola, it is unendurable! I who love you so, that literally my whole soul is bound up in you,—not simply my happiness, but my whole self and being,—I would rather that you should die and be lost to me for ever, than that you should continue to live in the same world with me at such a cost! I know the man!"

Even this absolutely unexpected outburst, made as it was with startling passion, did not appear very greatly to surprise Viola. Perhaps in her distraught state, exhausted physically and mentally by the emotions she had gone through, she scarcely knew what was happening, or, if she did, was unable to grasp its relations to the facts of her previous life, whose thread seemed to have slipped from her fingers when she left the land behind her.

"I have told you that I am ready to do anything in my power to save you, but without your assistance I am helpless. Will you come with me now, or perhaps to-morrow, to my friend, Mrs. Lincoln?"—Viola started.—"Ah! you have been prejudiced against her, I see, but I know she could advise and help us both as no one else could. She will sympathise deeply with you; her marriage was arranged very much as yours has been arranged; her inexperience and conscientiousness, and fear of giving pain, were played upon as yours are being played upon. I cannot tell you how lovable she is,—that I should like you to find out for yourself. Dear Viola! will you let me take you to her?"

"Oh! no, no," she said, in a dreamy tone, almost as if the answer were automatic; "my mother and my aunt tell me that one must not know her."

Harry sighed. "But won't you judge for yourself for once?" he urged. "Mrs. Lincoln has done what most people think wrong, no doubt, but most people are doing with the utmost self-congratulation what Mrs. Lincoln, on her side, thinks degrading. There are different ideas of right and wrong in the world, you must remember."

"There can surely be only one right and one wrong," said Viola.

Her mother's teaching was doing its work thoroughly at the critical moment.

"If you won't go to her, then, will you let her come to you?—not to your home, of course, but to some appointed place outside?"

"That would be deceiving my parents," said Viola; "I cannot do that."

"And what resource do they leave you but deception?" he asked hotly. "You and they are not on equal terms; they can coerce you. Their power over you is despotic; and to resist such power all methods are justifiable."

"Oh! you cannot mean what you say! I have always been taught that the will of parents is sacred, and that no blessing can come to a child who acts in opposition to their wishes."

"Taught by whom?" Harry inquired; "by your parents."

"Every one would say the same," Viola replied.

"Every one has been taught by parents," retorted Harry.

"Oh! take me home, take me home!" she cried suddenly. "It is wicked to listen to such things."

"Stay with me a little longer," he pleaded. "Such moments as this come but once in a lifetime; and besides, even at the risk of your displeasure, I *must* speak plainly on

a matter of such deep moment to us both. You seem to forget that I love you, Viola. Have I no hope of winning your love in return?"

She looked disturbed and bewildered, as if her ideas of right and wrong, in spite of her teaching, were becoming confused.

"Anyhow, I mean to try with all my might and main to win it," Harry continued; "nothing can daunt me, and I shall never despair. The strength and depth of my own feeling justifies my obstinacy in hoping."

"Oh! take me home. I will *not* listen."

"Is that fair to me? Why will you not listen? Because you fear my pleading might move you? O Viola! if that is so, you have no right to forbid it, for your heart is half won!"

"It is not half won; it is *not* half won," she protested. "Why are you talking like this and making me feel so wicked? What would my mother say to it? It must be horribly wrong, for I dare not face the thought of what she would say. Mr. Lancaster, please take me home."

"Only tell me that I have some hope—just a faint gleam."

"Take me home," she repeated.

Slowly, regretfully, he turned the boat's head and rowed

back towards the shore. He saw that to say more just now would be to injure his cause. Viola was becoming frightened by her own feelings.

The return journey—how different from the exultant half-hour when they were outward bound!—was made almost in silence. As they touched the shore, Viola sprang out so eagerly that she almost fell; Harry's arm was only just in time to save her.

"Let this be symbolical," he said, retaining the hand which she gave him; "I have saved you. Farewell, and remember that you can always come to me for help—and never be afraid that I shall misinterpret your appeal if you make it. My advice to you is, to announce firmly and simply that you will not carry out your engagement, since to all intents and purposes it was forced upon you. In any case do let me know how things go on, and remember that I am entirely at your command, always."

He raised her hand and kissed it and held it between his own.

"You are too good to me," she said; "and I am very, very miserable. Thank you, and good-bye." Her voice broke; she drew her hand from his and hurried away. He would have followed, but she waved him back, quicken-

ing her pace, and presently vanished behind the first small headland.

Harry stood gazing at the spot where she had disappeared till a voice behind him made him start round.

"Love," said the philosopher, "is a temporary madness. Under its influence the human being"——

"Oh! what do *you* know about it?" cried Harry ferociously.

"Ah! a bad paroxysm," remarked Caleb; "very lowering to the general tone, and apt to disturb the intellectual balance if long persisted in."

"I abominate intellectual balance," said Harry irascibly.

"Naturally, naturally," returned the philosopher. "My young friend, if energetic movement relieves your feelings, do let me walk rapidly up and down the beach with you; I have time at my disposal."

"Oh, hang you!" Harry exclaimed; "can't you leave a fellow alone?"

"*Very* disturbing to the intellectual balance," murmured Caleb.

"Have *you* never had the heavens falling about your ears, and the sun darkened and the moon put out? Have"——

"On my recovery from a severe illness, on one occasion, I remember that"——

"Oh, this is more than I can bear!" Harry exclaimed; "I had far better pour out my woes to the stony rocks than to you!"

"I assure you I deeply feel for you," said Caleb.

"Yes, because of the disturbance to my intellectual balance," retorted Harry, with a snort. "Caleb, you are the most ridiculous man I ever met; you know everything and understand nothing; all is revealed to you, and you are blind as a bat. Free as air, you never move beyond the radius of a five-foot tether; and in the midst of life you are in death. Good-bye; and pray fervently for the disturbance of your intellectual balance." With this parting advice, Harry strode off and left the philosopher chuckling.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ENCOUNTER.

"And so Miss Sedley's wedding is fixed for the 7th," said Adrienne, cheerfully unconscious that she was inflicting torture upon the being for whom she would willingly have laid down her life. "I do hope the marriage will turn out happily!"

"That we shall never know," observed Dick Evans. "Marriages are always made to look well outside."

"Yes; unless one of the couple drinks," said Adrienne; "and even then it doesn't often come out till they give a garden-party." (This allusion to a recent scandal was received with smiles.) "For my part," Adrienne continued, "I think Philip Dendraith has misconceived his vocation. He ought to have gone on taking ladies in to dinner all his life. I would choose him out of a multitude for that office, but for marrying"——

She shook her dainty little head expressively.

"Young men always settle down after they are married," said Mrs. Dixie. "I am sure he is a most agreeable young fellow."

The agreeable Philip had admired the family plate and talked to Mrs. Dixie about ante-sunset times, thus enrolling her at once among his allies.

"I am glad it's not one of the girls," Dick Evans said, recklessly disregarding the fact of their large numbers and limited opportunities; "and I am glad not to have to congratulate *your* sister, Harry."

"Thank you," said Harry curtly.

"They seem to be hurrying it on," Dick continued; "the 7th—scarcely three weeks from now!"

"I wonder how the trousseau can be got ready," said Mrs Dixie. "I know that mine took six months to prepare; but then, of course, I had four dozen of everything, and the most exquisite work, all real lace—I was one mass of insertion (Valenciennes). My poor mother *would* have everything of the best, and"——

It suddenly struck Mrs. Dixie that she was committing an impropriety in alluding to underclothing in a mixed company, and she relapsed into a decorous but unexplained silence, preluded by a little cough which would have amply atoned for the grossest of improprieties.

Dorothy Evans, Dick's scapegrace sister, also took a hostile view of the marriage.

Philip's good looks and fascinating manner had not succeeded in lulling the girl's instinct for what is straight and genuinely chivalrous in man. "He's all talk and bows," said Dorothy, "and you always feel he is laughing at you to himself, though you would think, to hear him, that you were the loveliest and the most fascinating person that ever lived. He's a nasty man, and I hate his eyes."

Dorothy had hit upon the one traitorous feature in his face; perhaps no such man ever had eyes entirely trustworthy. Not that Philip's had the proverbial difficulty of looking one in the face; he could stare most people out of countenance. But his native subtlety, and the coldness which lay at the root of his character, gave their expression to the eyes, and won for them Dorothy's dislike.

Harry had received the news without betraying himself, but it was more than he could endure to stay and hear it talked over. The discussion was in full swing when he left the room, quietly whistling an air from a comic opera. He ruefully admired his own acting, although thinking at the same time how very easy it always is to deceive the people who imagine they know one best! He set off at once for the Manor-House, determining, rashly enough,

to make an attempt to see Viola. He thought that probably a violent reaction had set in after the heretical teachings of that afternoon on the water; that in the exaltation of repentance and the return to duty, she had cut off her own possible retreat by at once fixing the day of her marriage. It was an act of atonement. Probably, however, a second reaction had taken place since then, and upon this Harry built his hopes. Having searched the gardens in vain, there was nothing for it but to go to the house and ask for Mrs. Sedley in the usual way.

Mrs. Sedley appeared, and entertained her visitor solemnly in the drawing-room, among the "lost souls" and the grand piano.

Harry had never in his life found conversation so difficult; that was not usually his weak point, but to-day his mind became a blank every time he looked at the dull grey face of his hostess, whose voice alone was sufficient to check the imagination of a Shelley.

"Is your daughter at home?" he asked at length, feeling, if not looking, very guilty.

"Yes; she is at home, but she has a headache. Of course, we are all very busy preparing for the wedding."

"Naturally—I am sorry she has a headache "——

"Thank you; I have no doubt it will not last very long."

"I suppose I—may I see her?" asked Harry, with sudden boldness.

Mrs. Sedley looked rather surprised, but she said, "Certainly," and led the way to her own sitting-room, where Viola, in the cold northern light, among colourless cushions, was lying upon a severe-looking sofa. She sprang up to greet the visitor, whose presence appeared greatly to astonish her. She appeared pale and ill. The same constrained conversation went on as before, until the advent of tea afforded a merciful relief to the unhappy trio.

Harry was at his wits' end, yet determined to effect his object, though he had to prolong the call till the curfew hour. Some diversion, he hoped, might sooner or later occur, although Mrs. Sedley sat there, with a polite and patient air of waiting till he should go, that was most disconcerting. She looked, as usual, quite uncomplaining, but very suffering. Harry, however, was resolved. He went to the window on pretext of admiring the view, and, to his joy, he saw Geoffrey crossing the lawn. He at once shouted to him.

"Holloa, you here!" said Geoffrey, changing his direction. "Don't know if the mother will let me in with my dirty boots. . . . Well, Viola, how's the headache? Look here!" and he held up a trout by the tail.

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"Eight pounds,—there you are, mother: I lay it at your feet. Look here, Harry, you might take the other ones to *your* mother, with my compliments."

"Thanks! She will be delighted."

Mrs. Sedley brightened a little, as if expecting that he would take the trout and go, but, on the contrary, he established himself in an easy-chair and engaged in a dialogue with Geoffrey upon the subject of fishing, which contained a vital principle so vigorous, as to promise for it little short of immortality. Mrs. Sedley sighed. She had a great deal to do, and very little time to do it in. Harry knew that, and glued himself more firmly to his chair. He had propounded a theory about flies that Geoffrey would not hear of for a moment, and as Harry stuck to it obstinately, a long argument was the result;—as Geoffrey said, it was distressing to see a sensible fellow making a fool of himself.

At last Mrs. Sedley rose. Would Mr. Lancaster kindly excuse her. She had some important letters——

Harry sprang up, polite beyond all expression,—certainly Mrs. Sedley must not for a *moment* think of letting him detain her. In the interests of science he felt it his duty to root out a common error from Geoffrey's usually clear mind, but——

This created a clamour, and in the midst of it Mrs. Sedley retired. After that Geoffrey found his opponent singularly improved in mental grasp. His arguments grew milder, and before long he was brought to confess that he saw and repented his error. Geoffrey then became restless, as he usually did within four walls, and proposed to go out.

But Harry's politeness would not allow him to desert Viola.

"Oh! she won't mind," said Geoffrey.

But the courteous guest, in spite of her assent, could not bring himself to commit this breach of manners.

"Well, then, you'd better stay and entertain her, while I go and have a wash and brush up. I feel more picturesque than beautiful, more beautiful than clean!" and he went off by the open window.

Harry watched him out of sight, then he turned rapidly, glanced at the door, and went over to where Viola was sitting. He took her hand in his and said quietly, "Viola, you have finally consented to this marriage in a fit of self-sacrificing ardour, and you are even now frightened of your deed. I have come to tell you again that you are wrong, and that you are doing what you will repent all your life. I have also come to tell you once more that I love you with all my heart and soul, and that I want you to promise to come with me to-morrow to town, not that I

may make you my wife, but that I may protect you from being his. If the pressure upon you is as irresistibly strong as it seems to be, will you take my name,—don't start,—take my name, so that you cannot take his? You will return to your home, or do whatever else you please, without feeling that I have in any way, or at any time, a claim on you. I know my proposal would receive hard names from most experienced people, but I regard all things as of less importance than your salvation. Wait one minute—let me speak—we may be interrupted at any moment. I must not disguise from you that there is some risk in this plan. It would create a scandal; your good name would be attacked. But is that worth considering in comparison with—with what is proposed for you?"

She winced and turned away with a gesture of passionate despair.

"I don't know anything; I can't balance things; I am bewildered and terrified."

"Upon my soul, I believe mine is the only way to save you!" he exclaimed. "I entreat, I beseech you to consent to it."

"It is impossible—it is so deceitful. And how could I accept such a sacrifice?"

"To have saved you would be my reward. I have

thought it all out; this is no hasty idea of mine. Viola, Viola, have pity on yourself and me. If you had consented to take refuge with Mrs. Lincoln, it might have been managed without this more serious step from which you shrink, but since you will not"——

"*What's that?*"

Viola gave a little half-suppressed cry, for at the open window, playing with the tassel of the blind, stood Philip Dendraith, blandly smiling. When he smiled so Viola always felt a nameless terror.

"I hope I do not intrude," he said, advancing into the room with slow, firm footsteps, as if he were enjoying something leisurely. "Viola, my love, I am sorry to hear you are not well to-day." He went up and kissed her with an air of familiarity.

Harry set his lips.

"You must excuse these little demonstrations," said Philip, with a wave of the hand. "We haven't met for a whole day, you know."

"Pray don't apologise to me," said Harry, keeping guard over his voice; "any apology you might think necessary would be due to Miss Sedley."

Philip glanced at the visitor out of the corner of his eyes, and gave a cold smile.

"I do hope I wasn't interrupting something interesting," he said. "I know what you can be at your best; quite a Sheridan, upon my honour!"

"Shall I go on for your benefit?" said Harry, looking at his rival with steady eyes.

"Pray do," urged Philip, while Viola gave a frightened gesture. "Kindly allow me to find a comfortable chair first, that I may the more enjoy the treat in store for me. So—this is most luxurious. I didn't know your mother would have tolerated such a lounge in her house, Viola—*une chaise de Sybarite*."

He leant back luxuriously, moving first a little closer to Viola, so that he could lay his hand on the arm of her chair, or touch hers now and again when it so pleased him.

From such a man it would be impossible now to conceal that something of a secret nature had been taking place when he entered. Viola's cry of dismay had betrayed them. Seeing how matters stood, and knowing what sort of enemy he had to deal with, Harry took a characteristic resolution.

"Your suspicions are correct," he said calmly; "you did surprise a conversation between Miss Sedley and myself, which we did not wish to be overheard."

"*Candide,*" murmured Philip, reaching out and taking a very musty and mouldy copy of that work from the long-undisturbed bookshelves. "There is an interesting proverb of George Herbert's which you may, perhaps, be familiar with: 'When the tree is fallen all go with the hatchet.'"

"Not yet is the tree fallen," said Harry; "but I think it is better that it should fall. You must know that I have become acquainted with all the circumstances of your engagement."

Philip bowed. "Your interest in our affairs is most flattering."

"I will not mince matters," Harry continued hotly, "now that Miss Sedley is being forced into the marriage"—(Philip looked round)—"that you have taken advantage of her helpless position in the hands of parents who are willing to sell her to you—that is the long and short of it—in order to extricate themselves from their financial difficulties"——

Viola started up.

"I cannot hear such things," she cried.

"I beg your pardon," said Harry. "I was wrong to speak as I did, but I am at liberty to say that Mr. Dendraith is to all intents and purposes intending to marry

you against your will, that you have asked him to release you, and that he refuses. I consider myself also at liberty strenuously to advise you to refuse to carry out your engagement, and to dare everything rather than fulfil it."

"There is an audacity about you," said Philip, looking up at him from his reclining attitude, "that really carries one away; a degree less audacity—were it but a hair's-breadth—and one would not tolerate you for a moment. I hope you are going to increase the dramatic effect by telling me that you have been proposing to Miss Sedley to elope with you. Keep it up. By the way, there is another proverb which I might appropriately cite: 'Where there is no honour there is no grief.'"

Harry flushed deeply. "As I hold it quite unjustifiable to marry a woman who is not really free to refuse you, I hold it justifiable to rescue her by any means in one's power; she is not to be sacrificed to an artificial code of honour."

"Rather more ingenuity than honour about that view, methinks," said Philip. "Do you know, sir, that some men in my place would treat you in a manner that might be somewhat compromising to your dignity?"

"It matters not to me what some men in your place might attempt," said Harry. "I have to deal with *you*, and

I am quite prepared to do so, in any manner that may seem necessary."

"Perhaps we had better continue our little chat outside," suggested Philip, rising; "it is useless to trouble Miss Sedley with these trifles."

"Certainly; but I have very little more to say. It is well, perhaps, that you should know that it is my design to oppose your marriage, and that I consider I have the right to do so by every means in my power."

"The lady to the victor," remarked Philip coolly, as he led the way to the garden.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN VAIN.

To the consternation of every one, and the indignation of Mrs. Sedley, Viola fell ill. She was not seriously ill, but the doctor said that her nerves were unstrung, and she must see nobody who might excite her, for at least a week. He regretted to have to be so barbarous, but Mr. Dendraith most certainly must not be admitted.

Mr. Dendraith consigned the doctor to perdition, and tried to prevail upon Mrs. Sedley to allow him to see Viola, notwithstanding. Little did he know that meek and mild lady. She was immovable. He began to fear that the marriage would be put off, in which case Harry Lancaster might give trouble, though Philip trusted to his own powerful influence and to that of Viola's conscience, to overcome all opposition. The doctor said that the invalid needed only a little treatment, combined with perfect quiet, and there was no reason to postpone the marriage, though a very long and fatiguing wedding-tour could not be advised.

On the whole, perhaps, Viola's illness proved a safeguard for Philip, as Harry was unable to have any communication with her, and the appointed day was drawing always nearer.

The prescribed week of quiet spread into ten days, and then to a fortnight—terrible days both for Viola and for Harry. Nor was Mrs. Sedley much happier. Anxious as she only knew how to be, she spent her strength in praying for an impossible faith, and found her only consolation for its continued absence, in a severe self-blame that she possessed it not without praying for.

As for Viola, she did not know whether to wish those dragging days shorter or longer. At nightfall, relief that the day was over, and terror at the thought that another had passed, fought a pitched battle, till exhaustion drew their victim into a restless sleep. There were times when she was cruelly tempted to write to Harry and tell him she was ready to adopt his plan, but the thought was thrust aside as inconceivably wicked. She was ashamed to tell her mother how terribly hard she found it to do her duty. She would fall on her knees at night before the open window and pray, with all the passion of her soul, for strength and guidance; pray that she might forget the words that Harry had spoken to her out on the sea, words

that echoed in her brain and haunted her with their subtle and tempting sophistry.

And now the house began to fill; large numbers of rejoicing aunts and cousins and gleeful old friends came crowding in for the happy event (as they would insist on calling it), and Upton Court opened its disused chambers for the delighted members of the Dendraith connexion, who were so pleased that dear Philip was going to settle down and become a sedate and respectable married man, after his wild career in early life.

Viola was now convalescent, and very busy helping her mother to entertain their guests. Once Harry had written to her, saying that up to the very last moment he was always there, ready and eager to carry out his proposed plan if she would make an appointment. But Viola replied in a few lines entreating him not to write to her; her mother would wonder about the letters, and it could do no good. She thanked him warmly for his desire to befriend her, and said that she could not cease to remember his kindness. She took this opportunity of sending him all good wishes, and remained his very gratefully,—VIOLA SEDLEY.

He called after this, and found her in the drawing-room among a roomful of people, pouring out tea. He fancied

that there was a new dignity in her manner, born, thought the on-lookers, of the honour of coming wifehood, but in reality called forth, as Harry sadly divined, by the stimulus of great suffering.

Once or twice he caught her glance, and made another mute appeal, but she shook her head sadly and turned away, and the miserable game went on.

Two days before the wedding there was a ball at the Manor-House.

Philip expressed a desire that Viola should dance with no one but himself that night, unless she first asked his permission. It seemed to her to be taking airs of possession rather soon, but she said nothing, being too sick at heart, and too accustomed to follow her mother's ideal of womanly submission to offer any resistance. Her recent illness would make a good excuse for refusing.

The drawing-room was roused out of its long doze. The "lost souls," to their great amazement, had their glass cases taken off, and candles stuck into them; the silken chairs were revealed in all their faded glory, and placed round the walls of the room to make space for the dancers. The dim old room was scarcely recognisable.

The dancing went merrily, thanks to Mr. Sedley's undeniable social talents and to Sir Philip's energy. Mrs.

Sedley was unable to depress her guests, though she did her unconscious best in that direction.

A boisterous country-dance was just over; the couples were hurrying into the hall, leaving only Lady Dendraith in a stiff-backed chair, with her chubby hands crossed on her lap and her head drooping on her breast. According to established habit, the old lady had seized the opportunity for a quiet doze. "My son" was out of the room, and there was nothing to keep her awake.

Her daughter-in-law elect, who had not been dancing, remained behind when the crowd passed out, hoping for a little rest and quiet. Her white dress, soft and long and flowing, was very becoming to her; Philip had told her so to-night, and several others, not perhaps quite so competent to judge.

She had a bunch of white roses in her hair and at her breast, and on her neck a small diamond crescent sparkled.

Thinking she was alone, except for the sleeping Lady Dendraith, she had leant her tired head upon the red cushions of the sofa, and for a moment closed her eyes.

When she opened them again Harry Lancaster was looking down upon her.

She started up.

"Oh! why do you come to me? It is not kind; you weaken me. For pity's sake, go!"

"Do you grudge me these farewell moments—I who love you so?"

"Hush, it is wicked!"

"That I don't for a moment believe. The real wickedness is that"——

"You are mad!" she exclaimed. "We shall be overheard."

"Who can overhear?" he asked, lowering his voice. "Lady Dendraith is asleep."

"Her son would hear you if he were in the next county."

"Viola," said a voice, at which she started and trembled violently, "I have been looking for you everywhere."

"Except here, apparently," said Harry.

Philip looked his enemy up and down, and down and up, and passed him by without comment. The whole thing was done with such quiet and exquisite insolence, that Harry coloured to his temples and Viola breathed quickly.

With a sudden impulse he bent towards her.

"Will you give me this dance?" he asked.

He had chosen his time well. Philip took a step forward. "Miss Sedley is engaged to me for it."

"No," said Viola, with sudden spirit, "I did not promise it to you." And she rose and laid her hand on Harry's arm.

Philip's shrugging of the shoulders and smile were not pleasant, as the two went off together. He had hidden his amazement and anger as he hid, or could hide, almost any emotion, however violent.

But not for a moment did he lose sight of the couple as they whirled together among the dancers. He thought that Viola danced with more appearance of pleasure than she had danced before that evening, though previously *he* had been her partner. When had she vouchsafed to him such looks and tones? Her face, to his jealous eyes, seemed softened and glorified. Never before had her imprisoned beauty made so triumphant an escape. Could it be possible that some other man had succeeded in quickening the throbs of that steadily beating heart, when he, Philip, had failed? It seemed incredible; yet Viola's coldness towards himself required some explanation.

When the dance was over, and the couple left the ball-room, Philip rose and followed them at a distance. He was too prudent to openly display his jealousy, too jealous to let them out of his sight.

A crowd in the doorway, however, prevented him from

leaving the room for a few seconds, and when he reached the hall the rebellious pair were nowhere to be seen.

They had been tempted by the brilliant starlight to wander out on to the terrace, where the mildest of night-airs was moving now and again a breathless leaf, murmuring here and there among the ivy. The great avenue looked very solemn and dark under the stars, the vast old trees showing against the sky like silent Sphinxes, full of a secret knowledge never to be revealed, deep as life and terrible as Destiny. The human element was utterly excluded, and the heart ached at the penetrating coldness of that awful omniscience, wherein there was no love and no pity.

From the open windows of the ballroom stole presently the sad, sweet notes of a waltz;—*that* was the human note, full of longing, and of melancholy almost rising to despair.

The music poured out flood-like, assailing, as a sea in tumult, the fortress of that all-knowing Silence. It was like the human heart rising in revolt against its narrow destiny, yearning unceasingly towards the larger and the lovelier and the better which haunt it evermore, like the refrain of a sweet song, heard and half-forgotten in the bygone days.

"Heaven help us! I love you and I can't move you!"

exclaimed Harry desperately. "I should like to know what were we sent for into this vast machine of a world that goes spinning on century after century, grinding human nerves and hearts to powder! What fiend was it who invented consciousness, who made torturable nerves, and hearts that are mere insignificant atoms of the universe, and yet capable, each poor atom, of such infinite woe? Surely we must be a mistake, an unlucky accident that occurred during the cosmical experiments of some meddlesome god, which he has not taken the trouble to rectify or expunge."

"I fear it is very wrong," said Viola, with a deep sigh; "but I have wondered myself of late why we were given such power to feel pain, and at the same time placed in a world where duty seems always to lead to it."

"Yes, and *not-duty* too," said Harry. "You can't dodge it, try as you will. I think the world is divided between people who are dull and don't live at all—people who call themselves happy, but don't know what the word means—and people who suffer mortal anguish, but who might know the joys of Paradise; whose life is turned into a fiery torrent which scorches instead of warming and invigorating. That troublesome young god had a magnificent idea when he thought of us, but he failed in the execution; and the result is wreck and ruin as terrific

as the Creation might have been splendid. We are brothers of the gods, but we are broken into a thousand fragments."

"Perhaps some day we shall be able to glue ourselves together again," said Viola, with a sad little smile.

"We want the glue," he said, "and that glue is happiness and love; the two things that good people and bad alike deny us. The world resists its own salvation."

Viola was silent.

"Duty is better than happiness," she said presently, "and better than love."

"Yet St. Augustine said, 'Love, and do what you will!' And what else have we to save us from the loneliness of life? What else can protect us from its awful coldness and silence?"

He gave a movement towards the dark, still avenue, and the glittering mystery of the heavens.

"The more clearly one realises what man's position in the universe is, the more he feels the need of close fellowship and passionate love, and the more he must cling to the idea of immortality. It is not so much the eternity of the personality as the eternity of love that our hearts imperiously demand. Now you see why I am so persistent, why I allow nothing to overcome me till hope is

absolutely lost. Though you fancy that you think and feel very differently from me, though my ideas even shock you, I know that underneath the crust of your acquired sentiments there lies some feeling which responds to mine. We can break the loneliness and the silence for one another; we can piece together some of our broken fragments, and be more clearly whole and sane, more nearly complete beings, together than apart. If the artificial crust has so far prevailed, yet I am sure that if only I had a fair chance to make you understand your own latent self, I should prevail—don't be angry with me, Viola; if I am right, consider what you are doing in turning from me."

"If my life proves unbearable perhaps I shall die. God can't let me live and suffer always."

"I don't remember many cases in which God has shown Himself so considerate," said Harry bitterly.

"Oh! don't say such things, I implore you," she cried.

"Dear Viola, you are bearing yourself up with false ideas, false hopes, false pieties;—forgive me for saying so—but they *are* false, because they flatly and openly contradict the facts of life as we know them."

"I can't argue with you; you confuse my ideas. I can only cling to what I have been taught, and try to do my

duty accordingly. What else is possible to me? *You* may be able to do right in your own way—I don't know—but how can I?"

It was said pathetically, sadly.

"It wrings my heart to see you fluttering like this in the meshes of a worn-out, lifeless old error. It is as if you were drowning in some deep sea, dragged down and smothered by a mass of tangled weeds which you would not let me pull away. Some day you will see it all yourself; a rough, rude hand, instead of a loving one, will tear it off, and then how bitter will be your regret with no human being to comfort or to help you!"

"Except an insignificant creature called a husband," observed a cool, polite voice through the darkness. "He, however, having not yet assumed that extinguishing title, ventures to claim the fulfilment of a promise to dance the next waltz with him, if it is not asking too much. Perhaps the fact of being a husband minus only two days, depreciates him in anticipation."

Viola laid her hand on his proffered arm, murmuring something about not knowing the dance had begun.

"Pray don't apologise," said Philip; "it is for me to apologise for my tactless intrusion."

They walked up the terrace together in silence.

At the end Philip paused, leaning against one of the stone pillars of the terrace. "You seem to find Mr. Lancaster's conversation spiritually nourishing," he remarked.

Viola looked up, but made no reply.

"He is a very interesting young man," said Philip.

Again no answer, only a steady gaze.

"His only fault is an unfortunate prejudice against myself; and as my own experience somewhat confirms his opinion, I have, of course, few objections to make to it."

A pause.

"I pride myself upon my tolerance," Philip continued urbanely; "I consider it uncouth to be intolerant or even fractious. I don't dissipate my forces in guerilla warfare. You understand."

In his insolent attitude, with his arm upon the pillar of the parapet, he looked down at his companion steadily, telling off his sentences one by one, and leaving a pause between each, so that they seemed to fall like stones into silent water.

Viola's eyes at last sank before his, and a tremor passed through her.

"You are cold," said Philip. "Would you like to go in?"

"I am not cold."

He bent forward and drew her white shawl closer round her. She shrank under his touch.

"Why, you are shivering!" he cried. "It is dangerous to stay out here in your thin dress. I don't want to have you laid up again. Delays are dangerous, especially with such a very interesting young man coasting round. Flowing moustachios and blue eyes, even in the absence of regular features, are not to be trusted. Don't imagine for a moment that I bear him any ill-will; on the contrary, I sympathise heartily with his admiration for yourself; but you will allow that I am justified in endeavouring to frustrate his designs if I can."

He offered her his arm with a bland smile, and led her into the house.

"I think, by the way," he said as they crossed the hall, "that I asked you not to dance with anybody but myself to-night. It is perhaps a little freak of mine, but do you mind gratifying it?"

"I am not anxious to dance any more with any one," said Viola; "I am too tired."

Philip laughed. "You are no diplomatist, my love. You might have pleased yourself and me at the same time there, if you had been less uncompromisingly honest. How do you expect to govern your husband at that rate?"

"I don't expect it; my place is to obey."

"Yes, ostensibly; but you know there are circuitous routes as well as straight ones to the same spot. A wife can generally attain her object if she knows how to manage cleverly; and I shall be charmed to be managed cleverly, I assure you, and promise to keep one eye permanently shut so that you will have no difficulty in finding my blind side."

"Thank you," said Viola, "but I don't wish to find it."

"On one or two points I admit I am apt to show my teeth, and I am afraid—such is the infirmity of human nature—that Mr. Lancaster might cause me to snarl, if he is not careful. However, I have been weak enough to fall in love, and that makes me very manageable. I am waiting, *pining* to be managed. Two short days more to pass, and then, my love, you will take me under your charming jurisdiction. What prospect could be sweeter?"

How did it happen that, after all this profession of submission on the part of the bridegroom-elect, Viola left him that night with a sense of being absolutely crushed beneath his dominating and resistless will?

CHAPTER XX.

A BAD BEGINNING.

GREAT anxiety prevailed at the Manor-House that the wedding-day should prove fine. The bride alone did not share the anxiety, though she said "I hope so" without flagging, when the guests expressed their feelings with regard to the desirable omen. Lady Clevedon had come over the night before the wedding with the intention of preventing Mrs. Sedley, as much as possible, from dwelling on the sadder aspects of the event. She brought, as aides-de-camp, with Mrs. Sedley's consent, Harry Lancaster and Arabella, whose unremitting sprightliness might be expected to have a cheering effect.

But Arabella was only an accessory; Lady Clevedon discreetly chartered Geoffrey for her enlivening purpose, Geoffrey being the only person who had ever been known to make his mother laugh.

He reminded his aunt that this had been done at an enormous expenditure of vital force, by means of a terribly

energetic imitation of an Irish reel, and only in the last wild paroxysm had his mother displayed the slightest amusement. Geoffrey appealed to Lady Clevedon's sense of propriety to convince her that the experiment could not be repeated in the present circumstances.

"My dear boy, be as foolish as you know how; regard the occasion as a sort of carnival, and no one will say you nay."

"A most cheering invitation," said Geoffrey; "but how is one to get up a carnival in a roomful of stuck-up wedding-guests?"

"They are only stuck up because they are not amused; go and amuse them."

Geoffrey gave a rueful whistle. "Well, I call this simply cruelty to animals. What would you have me do? Go up to my mother with my hands in my pockets and ask her how she feels to-morrow?"

"Graceless boy! To-morrow your mother will want all the consolation we can offer her."

"Well, that's the sort of thing I never *can* understand," said Geoffrey, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Mothers bring up their daughters on purpose to get married, and then require more pocket-handkerchiefs than can be afforded by any family of moderate means when the happy event comes off."

"You have much to learn before you understand women and their ways, my dear," said the lady, with a laugh.

"Oh, I've watched 'em," observed Geoffrey, "and it seems to me very much like watching a lot of young tadpoles in a pond. You see them wriggling and scuttling about, but you can't for the life of you make out what they're doing it for, and it's my belief they don't know themselves."

"Which, tadpoles or women?"

"Both; but, of the two, commend me to the tadpoles for method."

"You young heretic! Wait till you enter the woman's empire, and then tremble! Luckily we have our revenges. Ah! Viola, my dear, let me look at you. Very nice indeed. I'm glad to see the old lace again, and I hope you will wear it oftener than your mother did; I call it wasting good lace to save it. Ah! and the nice old Dendraith diamonds too. Harry, doesn't our bride look beautiful? It is good for a woman to be admired; it makes her admirable. Philip has worked wonders already."

Viola was trembling and colouring either at the praise or at Lady Clevedon's appeal to her cousin to confirm it.

"And this is the bridegroom's gift, is it not? Very lovely and most becoming. Did I not tell you," Lady Clevedon added, aside, "that hers was a face to improve?

The change has come about sooner and more startlingly than I expected."

"I think your niece is very lovely," said Harry simply.

Lady Clevedon went off to the assistance of Mrs. Sedley, to whom social duties were always arduous, and Harry Lancaster approached the bride.

She stood with her hands clasped before her, not looking up. He saw that she was breathing quickly.

"I hope you won't be angry with me if I ask you to accept a small wedding-gift," he said, in a not very steady voice. "It is a little antique ornament I found in Italy, of little use, but I thought the chasing finely done. It is said to have belonged to the Calonna family, and to have played a somewhat malign part in more than one duel, but it is now put to the peaceful purposes of a paper-knife or a mere ornament."

He handed her, as he spoke, a little instrument of finely tempered steel, with an elaborate handle exquisitely chased.

"The blade is rusty; the man in the shop where I bought it, assured me, as a recommendation, that the mark is really an old blood-stain! He looked ready to stick it into me when I laughed."

"How beautiful! and how good of you!" she said. "I shall value this very much."

She hesitated for a moment, and then thrust it through the coils of her hair.

"How perfectly charming!" exclaimed the watchful Arabella, rapturously. "Really, of all your wedding-presents, I envy you this one most. There is something quite fascinating about it. It looks as if it might have done many a secret deed of darkness before it was promoted to these gayer offices. I am sure it must have some sinister history; it makes you look quite dangerous, Miss Sedley, but *so* interesting! Doesn't it, Mr. Lancaster? Quite a Lucrezia Borgia. We shall be hearing dreadful things of you, I am sure; it will be quite kind of you to give us all a new sensation. Do let it be something striking, won't you? Paper-knife or mere ornament as it is, I must confess I shouldn't like to have it raised against me. But it won't be *me*, I am sure; I never made anybody jealous; much more likely this Mrs. Lincoln who is coming to live here and shock us all. Mr. Lancaster, you don't know what responsibility may rest on your shoulders; it is really a dangerous gift—why, it is enough to make one commit a murder for the mere pleasure of using it."

"It would be a sin to waste it," said Geoffrey; "a flying in the face of Providence, which has provided all things for our use."

"Now then, Viola, my dear, we must be off," said her aunt. "Arabella, Harry, Geoffrey, and I, will go in the next carriage, and the bride and her father will follow in the last."

In a moment the room was cleared, and the carriage drove off.

"What has become of that girl's shyness?" exclaimed Lady Clevedon, straining her eyes to catch the last glimpse of the still, white figure of the bride, as she stood, bouquet in hand, upon the doorstep.

Harry made no reply, but the thought crossed his mind that great misery and great shyness were perhaps likely to counteract one another.

"I am glad the day is so fine," said Lady Clevedon presently; "it will put them all in good spirits."

"Yes," Harry answered.

The weather was fine certainly, but it was not one of those languorous days of summer that suggest nothing but rest and peace. The sunshine had indeed a singular brilliancy, but there was a blusterous wind careering over the land, swaying the ripening corn and making the trees rustle and complain of the rough treatment. Overhead, the cloud-masses had been scattered by the wild wind; no form had been left them; they were strewn in ragged

streamers across the sky, gleaming with captured light. But there was no suggestion of pain or passion in the aspect of the roughly handled clouds; rather a great joy in the infinite breadth of the heavens and the ecstasy of perfect freedom.

The grey old church, roused out of its habitual calm, was the centre of a scene of subdued excitement. Society in the village was stirred to its depths: only the bed-ridden remained at home to-day; the tiniest infants were rapt from their cradles and carried by eager mothers to the lych-gate, where one by one the carriages drew up and the wedding-guests alighted, sweeping or tripping or hurrying into the church, according to habit and character.

Lady Clevedon was among those who did her alighting deliberately, giving directions to the coachman in decisive tones, and then walking coolly along the paved pathway between the graves to the grey old doorway in the ivy-covered tower.

This was the last arrival before the centre of all interest: the bride.

The old Manor-House coachman, with a backbone that any steeple might be proud of, whipped up his horses on entering the village, and the carriage dashed up to the lych-gate amidst an amount of dust and flourish and

prancing that made one or two of the younger children cry.

Mr. Sedley alighted first, and was greeted with a cheer; then came a cloud of something soft and white, like the foam of the breakers, whose moan, even here, in the moment's excited pause which followed her appearance, the bride could just catch above the rushing of the wind.

There was a shout, and then a shower of roses, honeysuckle, and cottage flowers fell at her feet.

Many a "God bless you!" "Long life and happiness to you!" followed her as she moved between the tombstones on her father's arm, while suddenly the old tower started into life and sent out a peal of wedding-bells which was heard for miles along the quiet country—those eternal wedding-bells, ushering in the sorrows of the ceaseless generations!

The sunshine was pouring down upon the pathway, but the wind seemed as if it would prevent the bride from entering the church, so angrily did it bluster round her and press against her as she bent forward to resist it. As the wind among sea-foam, that western blast made her garments shiver and flutter together, as if in fear.

"She looks like an angel!" exclaimed an enthusiastic woman among the crowd, holding up her indifferent infant

for a last look as the white figure disappeared through the church-door.

"They'll make a lovely pair," asserted another admirer; "and don't the old gentleman look proud about it all!"

"The poor lady don't seem quite pleased, though; she's that white and thin. I'm thinking the poor thing's got something wrong with her liver. As I was a-sayin' to George only the other day"—and so on; the oracular remark made to George being to the effect that only a box of Parr's Life Pills stood between Mrs. Sedley and the grave.

Several people could recall the wedding of Mr. and Mrs. Sedley at this very church, among them old William; he, however, with patient humility, being ready at once to subordinate his reminiscences to those of any person who might think his own superior. Several did so, and "Willum" faded quickly into obscurity.

There was a dim, wistful look in his eyes as they followed the young bride up the pathway to the church; only yesterday, it seemed, she had chattered to him in her childish way, taken him into her confidence about her tadpoles and her pets, or entreated him, with tears in her eyes, not to go on working in the rain. The lonely old man loved her faithfully, and his heart ached as he thought of the Manor-House henceforth without her.

Within the church, when the bells ceased, was a solemn hush. The wedding-guests were ranged along the chancel, looking like a set of gaily dressed and very properly-disposed dolls.

At the altar stood the bridegroom.

"How distractingly handsome he looks!" exclaimed Arabella in a whisper to her neighbour. "If he weren't so nearly a married man, I should really fall in love with him!"

"You have still a few seconds to indulge in a transient passion," said Lady Clevedon contemptuously.

"Alas! he is already claimed," cried Arabella, with a sigh. "Look with what grace he greets the bride; it is charming! And those few sweet words that he whispers in her ear."

The bride's reply, had it been overheard, would have scandalised the spectators not a little.

"Please do not forget that I come here against my own wish, and can have no response in my heart for such speeches. And one thing more: please do not forget that what I say to-day is said with my lips only."

There was no time to answer, for the ceremony was about to begin.

Philip had counted on the effect of the solemn service

upon one of Viola's scrupulous temperament. He thought that she would feel the sacredness of the oaths she was taking, and that victory for him would be half-won by the strokes of her own vigorous conscience. He was quite unprepared for her repudiation of the whole service, and this continued opposition, meek and quiet as it was, roused the worst side of his character.

His bride, he reflected, had yet to learn the difference between a lover and a husband.

Over the altar was a stained-glass window of mellow tinting, through which the sunshine streamed. Every colour and shade of colour was there, blending, softening, gleaming, growing deeper or paler with the changing light and the occasional shadowing of a tree outside, blown back and forward by the wind. Viola was standing in the line of the sun's rays, and the colours stained her dress, passing across her in a broad band of radiance, and falling on the cold stone floor behind her, and on the half-effaced brasses at her feet. Upon her bosom a deep blood-red stain glowed in fiery brilliance, like the symbol of some master-passion in her heart, or perhaps a death-wound.

She remained perfectly still until the time came when the hands of bride and bridegroom were joined, and then

she gave a slight, scarcely perceptible shiver, which, however, was not lost upon Harry or upon Philip.

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

To the triumphant strains of the wedding-march bride and bridegroom walked back along the aisle to their carriage.

Was it only Viola who heard in that wonderful outburst the ring of something infinitely sad and hopeless?

"You look cold, my love," said Philip, when he and his bride were on their way back to the Manor-House, the sound of the bells still pursuing them in noisy and rather foolish rejoicing. "Can I put a shawl round you?"

"Oh, I am not cold, thank you," said Viola.

"Excitement a little too much for you, perhaps. Well, that will soon be over now. They can't amuse themselves at our expense much longer, let us be thankful. Soon I shall have you all to myself"——

He put his arm round her, and was about to draw her closer, when his eye caught the glitter of the ornament in her hair.

"What's this?" he asked. "Another wedding-gift? Uncommonly fine work too,—antique, and of the best Renaissance period. But what a murderous-looking thing to wear in your hair!"

"It is meant for a paper-knife, or merely to be regarded as a curiosity," said Viola.

"It is a real work of art; there's no doubt of that. Who is the possessor of so much artistic *flair?*"

"Harry Lancaster gave it me."

Philip looked round. "Indeed! It is very obliging of Harry Lancaster, but I object to your receiving presents from him, especially of this character. If one believed in omens, it might make one uncomfortable. You'll excuse me, but I must take possession of this sinister-looking hair-pin. I can't allow you to keep it."

Viola flushed up.

"It was given to *me*, not to you," she said, "and I cannot surrender it."

"*Cannot* is scarcely the word to use to me, my dear."

"*Will* not, then," she said hastily.

Philip looked at her in astonishment.

"I am unable to congratulate you on your wisdom, Viola. To begin your married life by deliberate opposition and disobedience is not the act of a sensible woman, but of a pettish child."

"I cannot part with my gift," Viola persisted.

"My dear, I have told you that I cannot allow you to keep it. What is to happen in such a case? You know

quite well that Lancaster has behaved in a way that is unforgivable. I consider that his conduct has been throughout ungentlemanly. We stand to one another in a hostile attitude. He did his utmost to supersede me in your affections; we meet on terms of enmity. Such being the case, I consider it a piece of infernal cheek on his part to give you a present, and I must insist on your returning it at once."

"No, no, I cannot, I cannot," she cried, with rising excitement, as Philip leant forward to take the object of dispute from her.

"Now don't be foolish," he said. "Can't you understand the situation and be reasonable? It is impossible for my wife, in existing circumstances, to wear the gift of Harry Lancaster."

"I won't wear it, then," said Viola; "only don't take it away from me."

"You must give it back; there is no alternative; and if *you* won't, I must. Will you give it back?"

"I have already accepted it. I can't give it back."

"Then you leave me no choice."

She had the knife clasped in her right hand. Philip began gently enough but resolutely to open the fingers.

Striving to close them again, she unclasped from her

neck the diamond ornament—Philip's gift—with her free hand.

"Will you give back that dagger?" asked Philip once more.

"I would rather give back these," she answered, holding out the glittering trinket.

Philip's face darkened.

"Infatuated woman! Do you want to ruin our chance of peace at the very outset?"

"I will obey you in all other things. I accepted this gift, not as your wife, but as *myself*. I was not your wife then. Will you not leave me even a little remnant of individuality? Am I always to be *your wife*, never myself? I have not questioned your authority, but you ask for more than authority. You ask me to surrender my personality. The greatest despot only commands, he does not altogether extinguish his subjects. You go too far even for a husband."

"You talk too much nonsense even for a wife," said Philip. "The world regards and criticises you now as my wife, and nothing else. What else are you? You possess no other standing or acknowledged existence. Therefore naturally I have a deep interest in your conduct. I am sorry to have to begin our married life with a disagree-

ment, but you really must understand from the outset, once for all, what our relations are to be. I desire nothing better than to be a kind and indulgent husband; but on such points as this I can brook no dispute. Now pray let's have no more of it. Give me that bauble without further fuss. We are near home, and must have no scenes."

But Viola's fingers only tightened their grasp as the carriage approached the avenue of the Manor-House.

"Very well, then, I must use a little muscular persuasion; there is no time to lose."

As he did so, Viola held the diamonds, which she had in her left hand, out of the window.

"On this one point I too am determined," she said; "if you take my gift, I drop the necklace!"

With a muttered oath Philip relaxed his hold.

"Obstinate woman! You don't know when the last payment will be made for this."

CHAPTER XXI.

UPTON CASTLE.

"Now, Marion, if you are not content, you ought to be, and I will listen to no plaints. Viola writes regularly and cheerfully (her style is really rather stately and good); her husband appears to be kind to her, and I cannot see what you have left to make yourself miserable about."

"Oh, I am not miserable, Augusta, only anxious—a little anxious."

"Now, pray, Marion, what for?" demanded Lady Clevedon brusquely. "Do you suppose that avalanches are lying in wait for your daughter, and precipices defying the laws of nature at every turn?"

Mrs. Sedley was silent. She did not dare to tell her sister-in-law that it was the very cheerfulness of Viola's letters that caused her anxiety. She could gather nothing from these clear unemotional epistles couched in language which had a certain quiet force, and vaguely suggested that the writer held many unsaid things in reserve.

"I must wait till she comes home," thought the mother, "and then I shall easily be able to judge."

The wedding-tour was now nearly over, and the happy pair were expected to arrive at their home at the end of the week.

Lady Dendraith drove over daily to Upton Castle, endeavouring to brighten up the damp tumble-down old place and give it, as far as possible, a bridal aspect. Her task was indeed a hard one. Of all gloomy old houses that ever a well-intentioned mother attempted to make look bridal, surely Upton Castle was the most hopeless. The poor lady gazed at its gaunt rooms and listened to the ceaseless moaning of the waves below its windows, in despair. Her one idea for effecting a bridal appearance was white satin; but after the introduction of an inordinate number of fire-screens, sofa-cushions, photograph-frames, album-covers, and other ornaments made of this festive material, her sole resource became exhausted, and still the shadows lingered gloomily in the corners, and hung, like a canopy, about the ceilings of the vast old rooms.

Lady Dendraith, sitting gazing at her unsuccessful distribution of white satin in the great drawing-room,—her bonnet, from sheer perturbedness of spirit, edged to one side,—was a sight piteous to behold. The dreariness of the

place, now in the throes of a thorough cleaning, was enough to discourage the most hopeful.

It seemed as if the effort to make the long-disused house once more a human habitation had disclosed a host of dismal secrets. After a lapse of nearly a hundred years, daylight streamed into musty rooms and corridors, where ancient spiders had established themselves in forgotten corners,—spiders with long pedigrees, and a goodly array of corpses to attest their title to distinction; and, alas! these respectable creatures now found themselves suddenly swept away by a democratic "Turk's head," and wondered irefully what things were coming to.

The caretaker of ten years' standing—a person of such intense and awful respectability that Lady Dendraith felt frightened of her—was tall and strangely thin, with a face tapering at each end to a nice point, a pair of small eyes, and a long pale yellow nose. Smooth iron-grey hair, brushed down over her brow and severely plaited at the back of the head, seemed a rebuke to all forms of frivolous hairdressing.

But if Mrs. Barber's appearance was awe-inspiring, her language was something that might turn one to stone. Poor Lady Dendraith felt like a lisping child in the presence of this living Dictionary.

"Well, Mrs. Barber," she would say with humility, "how are you getting on?"

With a stately inclination of the head Mrs. Barber would reply, "I am gratified to be able to inform your Ladyship that the preparations are progressing with as much celebrity"—(the good woman's copiousness and accuracy were not exactly on a par)—"as the circumstances will admit."

"Oh, I am glad of that; the time is getting short, you know, and we seem rather behind-hand. You see, my son will bring his wife home on Tuesday, and I am anxious to have everything looking nice and bright for their return."

"I can enter into your Ladyship's sentiments," replied the august one, with a stately bend of the head; "but as to the place looking *bright*, I don't anticipate that it is ever likely to do that. I have resided here for ten years, and I cannot remember that I ever saw it look, as we might say, cheerful. Them waves"—(Mrs. Barber did relax a little from the austerity of her language under stress of emotion)—"them waves are that mournful, beating day in, day out, against the cliff-side, that at times, I do assure your Ladyship, I have felt as if I must give a month's notice and go on the spot. At night, when the place is shut up, it's as still as a churchyard, barring the rats in the garret, which

worrits about among the lumber like creatures taken leave of their senses. And the size of 'em! Your Ladyship wouldn't believe it," said Mrs. Barber with much feeling, "but the tramp and scamper of them nasty beasts over my head is more like a man's footsteps than a vermin's."

"Dear me! Why don't you let the cat into the garret, Mrs. Barber?"

The bony form of the housekeeper turned straight round and faced her alarmed employer.

"Did I understand your Ladyship aright? Give my poor Maria to be worried by them great animals!"

"Oh, very well, Mrs. Barber," said Lady Dendraith meekly, "if your Maria is afraid of the rats"——

"What cat can do, Maria for many years *'as* done," said Mrs. Barber; "and for no other family would she have done as much. I say it with respect." Giving a slight sniff as a delicate finish to her remarks, the housekeeper turned again and led the way to the dining-room.

"Oh, this seems more forward," said Lady Dendraith. "But those old portraits look sadly gloomy, and I should much like to give them a little cleaning up; but Mr. Philip laughs at me. Still, for a young bride one feels that everything ought to be as cheering as possible."

When Lady Dendraith visited the drawing-room her

heart sank. It was enormously large and lofty, the light from the windows, which faced the sea and seemed almost to overhang it, was powerless to drive the shadows from the farther end of the room or to rise to the high ceiling. The furniture, of a stately character, stood in severe symmetry along the walls; not a footstool remained unbalanced by a brother footstool, staring at it from the opposite side of the vast fireplace, or from a corresponding sofa. It was difficult to imagine this gloomy room the kingdom of a young bride.

"Poor young thing! I wish the place had been a little less lonesome for her. I dare say she will be able to make a snug corner for herself out of the ante-drawing room, though, do what I will, it looks unhomelike. I *did* think the red carpet and blue curtains would have cheered it up!"

In a somewhat depressed mood Lady Dendraith returned to her own cosy home, leaving the housekeeper to her Maria and the redoubtable rats.

The eventful day proved wet. Before sunrise a mist lay across the sea, and crept inland, spreading over hill and valley, and soon obliterating every object of the landscape. It was to a world without form and void, a blank, expressionless world, that the young wife was to be welcomed. Five

months had passed since she had left her home on that brilliant July morning, and the summer meantime had given place to the dreariness of a spiritless November.

As the sound of carriage-wheels at length announced the arrival of the expected travellers, the hall-door was thrown open and Mrs. Sedley stood revealed on the doorstep, her figure defined against the fire-glow of the great hall behind. A little in her rear was Mrs. Barber and the portly butler, while on the stone ledge which flanked the flight of cold grey steps stood Maria, with tail erect and glistening eyes, in an attitude of excited expectancy.

The next moment the occupants of the carriage had mounted the steps and the bride was folded in her mother's arms.

The embrace was long and silent.

Philip then shook hands with Mrs. Sedley cordially, inquiring for her health and thanking her for having come to welcome them.

"You see I have brought back your daughter safe and sound," he said cheerfully. "She is rather pale to-night, after all our journeyings, but I hope the rest will soon make her look like herself again. What a magnificent fire! None of *your* ordering, Mrs. Barber, I am sure. You know what sworn enemies you and I used to be in old times

about your fires. (It's my belief the respectable person's chilling appearance put them out)," he added aside, with a laugh.

"Upon my word," he went on, looking round the shadowy hall, now filled with the fitful light of blazing logs, "the place looks really comfortable. What do you say, Viola?"

"Most comfortable," she assented.

Mrs. Sedley had led her to a large chair by the fireplace, removed her wraps, and made her warm her cold feet and hands before the blaze.

Maria, all curiosity, was circling round mother and daughter with curving back and agitated tail. Finally she rubbed herself against Viola's knee, and then jumped on to her lap.

"*Well!*" exclaimed the astonished Mrs. Barber, in amazement; "I never saw Maria do such a thing in her life before. I wouldn't have believed it!"

With a gesture that was almost passionate Viola had welcomed the animal and folded it in her arms. Her head was bent down for the instant, and when she raised her face again, it was very white.

Mrs. Sedley looked anxiously at her.

What was the indefinable change that she saw in her

daughter's manner and expression?—a change too subtle to be described, yet distinct enough to make Mrs. Sedley feel more than doubtful whether she could now discover her daughter's frame of mind. Viola seemed to have wandered away to a great distance. There was something a little careless, a little indifferent, in the carriage of the head, in the voice and gestures, and it struck Mrs. Sedley that she took but slight interest in her new home.

Mrs. Barber, who had secretly resented the idea of a mistress, came to the conclusion that she and the lady might get on well enough together if the lady were careful.

Mrs. Sedley, Mrs. Barber, and Maria presently conducted the new-comer to her bedroom, a vast, dim space over the drawing-room, with the same large, unsuccessful windows and the same symmetrical arrangement of Brobdignag furniture.

Below, a repast awaited the travellers, and Viola was exhorted to come down as soon as possible, as she looked worn out and must be hungry.

"Yes, hungry I am," said she; "I feel at present as if food and rest ought to content any human being, and yet curiosity is not quite chased away." She drew aside the curtains as she spoke and peered out into the night. "Pitch darkness," she said, with rather a singular intonation.

"The window looks out to the sea," remarked Mrs. Sedley. "But come, dearest; that you can admire at your leisure to-morrow."

An involuntary sigh escaped the young mistress of the house at the word "to-morrow," but it was checked midway, as she added with a smile, "Absurd curiosity indeed, since I shall have a whole lifetime in which to indulge it."

Mother and daughter descended the stairs together, followed in a zigzag course by the singular and devoted cat. Viola took her up and placed her on her shoulder, entering the dining-room with the creature curling affectionately about her neck and face.

"I wish I were an artist," exclaimed Philip, rising and coming over to his wife. "You have no idea what a charming picture you and Maria make."

An indefinable change of expression passed across her face as she altered the admired attitude, taking the cat in her arms and folding her close against her breast.

"The credit of it rests with Maria," she said, moving away towards the fireplace. The butler, a portly person, like an overgrown Cupid, presently announced that the meal was on the table, and the three forthwith sat down, in a rather constrained and uncomfortable manner, to the

repast. Their voices wakened a thousand hollow whispers in the vast room, and had a strange ominous sound mingling with the eternal boom of the waves.

To Viola it seemed as if each of the portraits was gazing at her, in the cold omniscient manner peculiar to those works of art. Everything about the place was weird and hushed and mysterious; there was something blood-chilling at times even about Maria, who had a way of appearing suddenly in unexpected places, or springing without warning on to the back of one's chair.

"It's my belief that cat's bewitched," Philip said; "see the way she glares at me with her green eyes!"

"I read somewhere that green eyes are the truest of all eyes," said Viola.

"Perhaps that's why they are so rare," Philip observed. "Get away, you green-eyed monster; I know I shall dream of you to-night, and that'll not be a nightmare exactly, but something worse."

"Well," said Mrs. Sedley, after some time had passed in desultory talk, "I think the best thing this tired child can do is to go to bed, and put off seeing her new domain till morning, when I hope the weather will have changed and everything be at its brightest and best. Then she will have to install herself as mistress of the

house, and make Mrs. Barber understand that she no longer has supreme authority."

Philip laughed.

"I expect the good Barber will grievously resent her dethronement, and we shall have some majestic English on the head of it. I hope she won't take umbrage and go. She is honest as the day, and devoted to the family."

"She shall not go because of me, I promise you," said Viola, with something in her manner that was new to it. "It would be better I should go myself. I can perhaps equal her in honesty, but I cannot claim to have served the family for so many devoted years."

She spoke half jestingly, and Philip laughed a little, but he glanced at her in a manner not exactly amused.

"Dearest," said Mrs. Sedley again, "you must really go to bed now, you are looking so tired."

Viola rose, and mother and daughter left the room together, Philip springing up to open the door for them. He returned to his place by the fire with a changed expression. The polite cheerfulness and even gaiety of his demeanour during the evening suddenly fell from him like a mask; his brow clouded, and his thin lips set themselves in a hard, disagreeable line. Much to her chagrin, Maria had been left behind in the dining-room, alone with her

master. A faint "*miaw*" disturbed his sinister meditations. He looked up with a frown, saw the cat, and following a savage impulse, he put out his foot and kicked her to the other side of the room, hearing, not without satisfaction, a dull thud as the creature struck against the panelling. Philip rose, lifted the cat in his arms, and walking across the room, quietly put her outside the door. There, on the hard floor, with her leg broken, the creature passed the night, and there she was found by her distracted mistress next morning, the animal trying, in her joy, to limp towards her as she heard the familiar footsteps.

CHAPTER XXII.

EXILED.

MARIA'S broken leg was at once bound up, and she found herself in a position of even greater importance than usual.

Viola begged to have the wounded creature beside her, in her own sitting-room, where she could tend her and give her food. This, and her evident concern for the animal, won the housekeeper's heart. No war was declared between the new mistress and her commander-in-chief. Mrs. Barber was even ready to indulge her well-conducted lady with a semblance of authority.

"If there is anything that you would like altered, ma'am," said the housekeeper graciously, "I hope you won't hesitate to say so. Her Ladyship arranged the furniture as she thought best, but of course you are quite at liberty to make any little change as you might prefer. Everybody has their own taste, which, of course, it's no blame to them but only what is natural."

"I think I have no taste of my own," said Viola. "It

seems to me impossible that any of the furniture could stand in any other position. I do not wish it altered."

And from that moment it seemed as if a spell had been cast over the place, as over the palace of the Sleeping Beauty; not a chair or a table, or so much as a footstool, budged by a hair's-breadth from its accustomed spot.

Viola's decree had petrified the house in its present form, and there it remained, solemn, solid, and eternal. It seemed as if its dignity must confound even the thunders of the Day of Doom, and might be expected to live through even that crisis, calm and undisturbed.

Mrs. Barber never ceased to marvel at Maria's strange accident.

"I left her with you and Mr. Philip in the dining-room as safe and sound as she could be, and in the morning——! She must have left the dining-room with you and your mamma," the housekeeper suggested.

Viola was never very explicit on this point. She could not, or would not, state whether the cat came out of the room or remained behind with Philip; and as Mrs. Barber had a wholesome dread of that polite gentleman, she dared not question him as she longed to do. So the affair remained a mystery.

Mrs. Sedley had to leave on the following morning, as

Mr. Sedley was not very well; but it had been arranged that Viola was to drive with her to the Manor-House for lunch, returning home for dinner in the evening.

"It appears to me, ma'am, that Mrs. Sedley's own indisposition is not what it should be," said the housekeeper; "I never saw any one look so like death—never!"

The speech, which was intended in the most friendly and complimentary spirit, made Viola turn pale. Her eyes wandered mournfully out to the sea, whose grey waters could this morning be dimly discerned through sheets of driving rain.

Mrs. Sedley's white face and the deep dark circles under the eyes told a tale she would fain have concealed. Last night, when for a short half-hour mother and daughter had been alone together, Viola had entreated to be allowed to return home for a little while, to look after the invalid and take some of her old duties again; but Mrs. Sedley, with tears in her eyes, had firmly refused. "Your duty now is to your husband," she said, "and I will never let you neglect that for my sake."

When the housekeeper left her, Viola remained in precisely the same attitude, gazing out to sea. The waves were tossing restlessly, forming for ever in new vigour, like endless generations, to culminate and then roll over and

lose their individuality in the waste of waters. How fresh and eager they looked as they climbed up to the breaking-point, wearing their crown of surf for a moment, and then with what a peaceful sweep they sank to the level of the dead waves, broken and gone, losing the fever of their short lives in a gentle annihilation! Viola's thoughts were breaking the bounds of her teaching. She rose, shook her head angrily, trying to banish them, but they streamed out triumphantly beyond all the limits that she set to their flowing. What had come to her? She remembered with a sense of relief that the rest of the day would be passed in her mother's society and in the old scenes of her childhood. Surely these evil spirits would be exorcised *there!* Philip was to be out all day; he had business to attend to; not till evening would he return, and then husband and wife were to have their first *tête-à-tête* meal in their new home. If only she could ask Mrs. Barber to come in and take it with them!

With this unholy aspiration in her heart, Viola set out through the driving rain for the Manor-House. The anxious questions which she asked about her mother's health were put aside by Mrs. Sedley; she had never been quite well for the last thirty years, never since the birth of her first child, but she was no worse than usual. Per-

haps to-day and yesterday her head had ached a good deal, but she had nothing to complain of. On the rack, Viola wondered, would she find anything to complain of?

Through the rain the familiar outlines of the Manor-House loomed into sight. As she alighted at the hall-door, Viola thought that she could realise what a spirit must feel who revisited the scenes of its earthly life after passing into the next phase of existence beyond the grave.

After the midday meal, at which were assembled the same group as of yore: father, mother, Geoffrey, and Viola, the rain cleared, and Geoffrey not wishing to allow brotherly affection to clash with his hatred of being indoors, proposed that the assembly should adjourn to the garden.

Here Viola was greeted by a rapturous company of dogs, and behind them came hopping and flapping excitedly her jackdaw, whose evident delight to see her again was more eloquently expressed, as Viola said, than that of her relations.

"Well, I *do* call that ungrateful," cried Geoffrey, "after all my fortnight's practice of the enthusiastic fraternal welcome!"

His embrace had been of the vigorous serio-comic order, by which alone he permitted his British emotions to find expression.

"I say, Ila, I wish you hadn't gone and got married,"

he confided to her when they were marching arm-in-arm along one of the straight walks of the old fruit-garden. "Life won't be worth living here all by oneself."

"I am sorry to leave you—but you can come over and see me, of course, whenever you like. And then you will be very soon leaving home. When do you expect to get your appointment?"

"Oh, Sir Philip is seeing about that for me," said Geoffrey. "Your marriage has its conveniences, Ila."

She winced.

"I say, what do you think of your husband after five months of his society?" the boy asked, so naïvely that even Viola, whose sense of humour was certainly not keener than the average, burst out laughing.

"Well, but what *do* you think of him?" persisted Geoffrey.

"I think him very clever, for one thing," she answered.

"And what else?"

"Very determined."

"And——?"

"Very handsome."

"Then I suppose you are awfully fond of him."

"One is often fond of people possessing not one of these qualities," returned Viola. "I dare say, in course of time,

some foolish person may become fond even of you, for instance—that is, if you cure yourself of the habit of asking questions."

Geoffrey made a grimace. "But, my dear, the subject, to a brotherly heart, is so interesting."

She smiled sadly. How this old familiar boyish nonsense made her heart ache! Ah! if only she could wipe out the memory of those awful five months, and take up the thread of her life at the point where she had left it. Even her mother could no longer protect her against the promptings of her evil nature. In Philip's presence all that was hard and bold and reckless came to the surface; she could not believe as she ought to believe, she could not feel as she ought to feel, she could not even *pray* as she used to pray. Her life was like some awful dream, and her husband the presence from which her whole being sought to escape in the frantic horror-stricken helplessness of a nightmare.

Never had she felt this helplessness more terrible than she felt it to-day amid the scenes of her former life, in the old home, whence a decree of eternal banishment had been spoken. "*Your duty now is with your husband, and I will never let you neglect that for my sake.*"

The old talismans were useless; their virtue had gone out of them. The future must be faced alone and unbefriended.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SELECT CIRCLE.

Unhappily for herself, Viola was not a person to whom one could remain indifferent. Philip, in spite of his exasperation, was still in love with his wife, after his own fashion. It was impossible for him to acquiesce in the cold and distant relations that she wished to establish between them; her conduct amazed and maddened him. In all his wide experience of life he had never heard or dreamt of such a woman. Her character was to him incomprehensible. He could neither frighten her nor soften her; threats, insults, sneers (and he was not sparing of all these) left her as meek and as cold as before.

If she had been a haughty, rebellious woman, giving him insult for insult, sneer for sneer, he might have understood it; but she professed the most complete wifely submission, obeyed him in every detail, and when he reviled her she answered not again; yet behind all this apparent yielding he knew that there was something he could not touch—the real woman who withdrew herself from him inexorably

and for ever. A stupider man might have been content, when he had so far succeeded in his object as to make her his wife, but Philip knew that this seeming success was, after all, a humiliating failure. That she had evaded *him* of all men in the world, despite his utmost efforts!—that was what galled him.

It was this exasperating conviction that made his manner towards his wife, in spite of its polish, at times absolutely intolerable. Her invariable meekness under extreme provocation served rather to incense than to appease him. It left him nothing to attack; he had no handle even for complaint. The average man thinks himself ridiculous and injured if his wife succeeds in maintaining an attitude independent of him and his commands—or wishes, as he euphoniously expresses it. His power is called in question if she is not at once absorbed into his existence, revolving round him as a satellite, accepting him as her standard and the arbiter of her fate. Any reserve, any withdrawal on her part is an injury which he bitterly resents, because in his own eyes, and in those of others, it stamps him as a man who fails to exact the privileges of his position. Unable to make his partner pass under the yoke after the usual fashion, he loses prestige and sinks in his own esteem.

Philip, accustomed for so long to absolute dominion, was driven almost to frenzy by the consciousness of being quietly held at bay by one of the gentlest and most submissive beings he had ever met. She had none of the usual little ways of women; one could manage a woman who had "little ways"—little fits of temper, and little fits of repentance; a woman who coaxed and protested alternately, who was sometimes jealous, sometimes angry, about her husband's admiration of other women. There was something to work upon in all this. But Viola! When did she lose her temper, or repent, or weep, or ask to be forgiven? When did she plead for a new gown or coax him for a new bonnet? When did she condescend to be jealous? Had he not pursued Arabella with attentions and compliments till he was sick of the sight of her and her wrigglings, and what notice had Viola taken of his conduct, what remonstrance had she offered? None; literally none. His doings seemed to be perfectly indifferent to her, so long as he kept out of her sight.

It was a scarcely credible situation!

The first few weeks after the return home were very troubled and wretched. Philip seemed to take a delight in humbling and humiliating his wife by every means in his power, and his power in that direction was unlimited.

Though it was all done in his most polished manner, though he never forgot that he was what he called a "*gentleman*," his conduct towards her was of a kind that no woman of her type could forgive, even if she tried. She knew now the reason of Harry Lancaster's passionate warnings; she knew now why he had said that he would rather see her lying dead before him than married to Philip Dendraith.

He was right! "Ah! mother, you will never know what I suffer for you; you never *shall* know, for it would break your heart, as it has broken mine!"

The sense of duty, desperately as it had been assailed in this hurricane of horror and disaster, still held firm, and still the poor mummied religion which had been offered to this passionate heart for a guide, held up a withered finger of exhortation. With these motives and these faiths Viola struggled on, fighting that desperate fight against herself and her own nature which fills the lives of so many women with inward storm and wreckage. Her faith now was her sole anchor. Without the belief that it was *right* to endure all that she endured, it would have been literally impossible for her to live her life for another day. That gave it—even *it!*—a sort of consecration.

Not long after the return of the bride and bridegroom

to their home the neighbours began to call upon them. They came to criticise, to indulge their curiosity and to perform their social duties. Mr. and Mrs. Evans, with their eldest daughter; Mr. and Mrs. Pellett, an absent-minded old student and his very commonplace wife; Mrs. and Miss Featherstone, a fashionable lady and her daughter, the latter a great huntress; Mrs. Dixie, in magnificent sunset effulgence, and finally Arabella, who was staying with Lady Clevedon, and begged to be driven over to call upon her charming niece.

Arabella made a great many awkward though proper assumptions about Viola's supposed state of romantic bliss and her presumed distraction if Philip left her for a day or two; she was disposed to talk a little archly about "somebody," and to indulge in gentle raillery on the subject of "honeymoons which lasted a good deal longer than one poor month."

Viola, unhappily, could not extract the cream of the situation and enjoy it, such as it was, in spite of its grim satire on her real position; it hurt without amusing her.

"Whom the gods intend to destroy," Harry Lancaster had once remarked, "they send into the world with a sensitive spirit, *minus* the sense of humour. Whom the gods intend to torture, but to keep alive for further sport,

they endow also with a sensitive spirit, but add to it a sense of humour abnormally strong."

The neighbours discussed the new mistress of Upton Castle with perfect freedom, but upon the whole not unfavourably. The Evans family were even enthusiastically favourable; perhaps because Dick, the family oracle, had pronounced, when he met her at Clevedon before her marriage, that she was "a nice, unaffected sort of girl, and very good form."

Geoffrey, who was a frequent visitor at his sister's house, used often to hear, at second hand, the criticisms of the neighbours, and sometimes he would repeat them to her.

"I say, Ila, my dear," he announced one day, "Mrs. Pellett thinks that you are sinking into a decline."

"She must have been comparing notes with Mrs. Barber, then," said Viola; "that is also her opinion."

"Then you have certainly found your way to Mrs. Barber's heart," observed Philip; "it is her highest compliment. If she loves you, she represents you with one foot in the grave."

"A good attitude to be photographed in," Geoffrey suggested, with a boy's extravagant foolishness. "Happy thought! We could arrange you artistically, with cross-

bones, you know, and an extensive churchyard for a background. You might be toying elegantly with a skull!"

Viola smiled, and drew her hand across her eyes, as if to erase the heavy lines beneath them.

Geoffrey wanted to know how she liked her new neighbours. Her judgments were indolently charitable. The only person she actively objected to was Mrs. Pellett, the lady who originated the "decline" theory. The others were all "very pleasant."

"You'll have to go and call on them, you know," said Geoffrey. "You *would* go and get married, and you must take the consequences. Does a woman promise to pay calls in the marriage-service? Rather rough on you, isn't it? Calling doesn't seem in your line."

"That is probably the reason it is given me to do," said Viola, in all seriousness; "it is a discipline."

Philip having gone to town for a fortnight, Viola managed to cajole her brother into sharing the "discipline" with her.

"Only two calls to-day," she said; "and it will be such a relief to me."

She was a little over-hasty in this last conclusion, as she afterwards found, to her cost. The first call was on Mrs. Pellett; "to get it over," Viola said. That exemplary lady

lived in a small red-brick house, which lay on the outskirts of Upton, smothered among trees, and very damp and dark.

Ushered into a musty drawing-room, where the blinds were down, the visitors had an opportunity of inhaling the heavy atmosphere, and of surveying the beauties of the room before the owner appeared. The table was in the exact centre, and in its own centre it wore, like a weight on its heart, a heavy china bowl, which stood on its head and supported (as a father acrobat, upon the soles of his feet, his little son) a second smaller bowl, this one in the normal attitude.

The glacial severities of the marble mantelpiece were softened by pastoral groups in pink china; gallant swains and bashful shepherdesses, with dispositions of marvellous sweetness. Let the world growl and grumble as it might, these delightful creatures smiled on untiringly. On the wall beamed the portrait of a lady, with pale glossy hair and a pink face, smooth as a pebble, small blue eyes and attenuated eyebrows, high up out of reach of the eyes, as if they were intended by nature to break the interminable expanse of the forehead which rose majestically above them. In spite of that forehead, no one would have had the temerity to suggest that the lady was a person of intellect. Anything more blandly and blamelessly feeble than

that face, with its thin nerveless lips, would be hard to picture.

"I believe she had the top of her head shaved and thrown into that forehead," Geoffrey declared; "and I believe Mrs. Pellett follows her example. Hers is just as fine; it's quite grand,—one feels in her presence like looking up at Mont Blanc."

"O Geoffrey!"

"It ought to look well in a sunset, but wants ruggedness. I wonder"——

The door opened at this point and Mrs. Pellett entered the room.

Geoffrey, who had absently fixed his eyes upon the owner's forehead, woke with a start to reply to her polite greeting. Mrs. Pellett was a good deal like the portrait of the pale pink lady, which she said represented her mother, whose sweetness of disposition and admirable character were but feebly reproduced in the picture. The parent surpassed the child in meekness: Mrs. Pellett had not given herself to district-visiting and village affairs without acquiring some decision of character. This applied, however, only to her own walks of life; in relation to the world in general, she was obedience itself. She who terrified the schoolmistress with a glance of her eye, and made

herself dreaded like the Day of Judgment among defaulting scholars, told Viola that she could not travel alone for however short a distance, and never left home without her husband.

When Viola saw that kindly but absent-minded old husband, she wondered how his presence could inspire any sense of security. He might have seen his wife run over by the slowest of waggons, and never have awakened to the melancholy fact till all was over. He was a scholar, a man who had distinguished himself at college, and who now carried in his handsome old face the stamp of thought and cultivation. He spent his days buried among his books, whence he emerged with eyes still turned inwards, and an unconquerable tendency to answer the frivolities of visitors and of his own family entirely at random.

"My dear, this is Mrs. Philip Dendraith," explained Mrs. Pellett, in a louder tone, for the second time, as her husband, though extremely polite and cordial in a blindfold sort of fashion, was evidently settling into a contented state of ignorance as to the name and condition of his guests.

"Yes, my dear, so you said,—so you said. It is a strange thing that one can live for years in a place and yet remain quite ignorant of one's neighbours. Mr. Philip Dendraith

is a name upon everybody's lips, and yet never before have I had the pleasure of meeting him."

Geoffrey's face was a study.

"My dear, you make a mistake," began his wife; "this is not Mr. Dendraith; it is"——

But the old man was not listening. He was asking Viola if she liked the neighbourhood, whether her father and mother were in good health, and how were all her sisters.

"Brothers, dear," remonstrated Mrs. Pellett.

"And brothers?" added her husband blandly.

"Your husband looks younger than I expected," he went on pleasantly.

"Charles!"

"Well, my dear, I looked for one rather more mature—not quite so boyish"——

"I don't look my age, I know," the audacious Geoffrey broke in, seeing that Mrs. Pellett had given up her husband in despair and turned to Viola. "My wife often complains about it, but I tell her it is a fault that will mend."

"Yes, yes," said the old scholar, nodding his head; "quite soon enough, quite soon enough. Very interesting old place that of yours—fine example of later Norman work; but I fear the sea is fast undermining it. My friend

Foster there tells me that the water is working its way under the keep, and that he doesn't think it will last for many years longer."

Geoffrey sadly shook his head. "I fear it is too true," he said. "I thought of building a breakwater to receive the brunt of the battle just at the point, but I am told that the plan is not feasible. The tide runs too strong round there."

"A sad pity," said Mr. Pellett in a musing tone; "we are losing all our fine old monuments, between the ferocity of the elements and the greater ferocity of the Vandal Man. But I must not get upon this subject—it is a sore point with me."

"Ah! then we shall sympathise," cried the unprincipled youth, with much feeling; "I too wage deadly war against the destroyers of history, the devourers of the past."

Upon this Mr. Pellett, all unsuspicious, took the serpent into his bosom; but the serpent, untrue to his normal character, underwent conversion in that citadel of honesty and kindliness, and left the house feeling extremely uncomfortable, for the old man had evidently taken a fancy to him, and had given him a friendly invitation, in parting, to come again.

"*Geoffrey!*"

"Yes, yes, I know," said that youth, with a frown and a blush; "let's say no more about it."

"But how *could* you? It was really too bad; I don't know what I was saying to Mrs. Pellett; I quite lost my head in my dismay at your behaviour. What possessed you?"

"Don't know, I'm sure," said Geoffrey, scratching his head uncomfortably. "Thought it would be a lark,—once in the mess, couldn't back out;—worst of it is, Mr. Pellett asked me to go and see him—dashed if I know what name to go under."

"Your own, of course," said Viola rather severely, at which her brother made a grimace.

He promised to behave like an archangel during the call at the Rectory, and he followed his sister, hat in hand, into the presence of the Evans family, with an expression that would have done credit to St. Sebastian.

Mrs. Evans was a tall, indefinite sort of woman, in non-descript attire; each year of her busy, careful, rather wearing existence had left its stamp upon her, not so much in signs of age as in a certain dim and colourless quality often to be observed among women who have passed their whole life in a small country village.

Married very young, she had missed her girlhood

altogether, and had to endure the troubles of a woman's life before she had had time to realise any of its possibilities. She had a large family and a small income, and she had lived at Upton from her girlhood. Two and two generally make four. Mrs. Evans at fifty was as narrow and dim and petty in thought, as she was patient and irreproachable in action. Her opinions might be accurately guessed before she had uttered a word, because those opinions did not grow from the depths of her own being, but had settled upon her, like dust, from the surrounding atmosphere.

A sort of dull tragedy (though the neighbours knew it not) was being acted before their eyes in the picturesque old Rectory, with its red-tiled roof and warm lichen-covered walls. Mrs. Evans never from year's end to year's end knew the meaning of that benign and radiant word: health. Headache, back-ache, neuralgia, weakness, weariness, and a thousand nameless oppressions were her cruel and constant companions; yet a word of complaint scarcely passed her lips, and her husband, though he acknowledged in words that his wife "enjoyed weak health," was as blandly ignorant of the actual meaning of those words as though he had spoken in an unknown tongue.

It was in *his* service, in the grim cause of wifely duty,

that she had surrendered so much, and he did not even know it! Among other things which she had had to surrender was her woman's power of attracting. That had entirely departed. She was excellent, admirable, but she was quite without charm.

Her fellow-creatures, at whose behest she had thus despoiled herself, now turned away from their obedient servant, rewarding her heroism with neglect, veiled under words of cold approbation.

Society has no reward for the faithful; only curses and stoning for the heretics.

The daughters of the Rectory were pleasant, large-limbed, fresh-looking girls, apparently unlimited in number, and somewhat wanting in variety. They respected their mother, but they worshipped their father: a singularly plain, pepper-and-salt-coloured man of clerical appearance and manners. Quite unmistakable were the deep lines from nose to chin, and the shape of that triangular portion of the face bounded by the cheek-lines, the nose and the upper lip. He had also a clerical habit of rubbing his hands together when he did not clasp them behind his back and tilt himself forward at intervals on his toes.

Like many of his cloth, the Rev. Richard Evans enjoyed more than most men the usual privileges of his

sex. His position was patriarchal; wife and daughters sat at his feet; his lightest word was law. So absolute was his rule that he never required to assert it. He was jovial, agreeable, but firm—very firm. His wife characteristically admired him for being firm with her and the family in matters wherein, in point of fact, he had absolutely no right to interfere.

Dorothy, the wild, auburn-haired youngest daughter, was the only one of the sisters who gave no promise of following in her mother's footsteps. She tore more frocks in one summer than any of her sisters had torn in their lives; she resented gloves, and would not keep her hair tidy. Sometimes she was disobedient, even — awful thought! when her father had commanded, and finally (most ominous sign of all of a lawless disposition) she hated and loathed the admirable Mrs. Pellett with the whole force of her young soul. To hate Mrs. Pellett was to hate law and order, to hate duty and worth personified. According to Dorothy, it was also to hate primness and propriety, to hate officiousness and cant and dunderheadedness, not to mention ugly caps and horrible Sunday bonnets, and all the subtle forms of prim ugliness that a woman of her type can collect around her. Mrs. Pellett had once interposed with an ill-advised homily when

Dorothy had been discovered in one of her many escapades, and the girl now cherished for her a hatred so strong as to be an absolute passion.

Admirable Mrs. Pellett! She was destined by her virtues to excite such evil feelings in the breast of more than one young and misguided creature.

Dorothy, like most good haters, was also an ardent lover. When she loved at all, she loved with her whole heart.

During the first call of Viola and her brother, this young scapegrace with a girlish horror of being "caught" by visitors, had retired hastily to the farthest corner of the room, from which vantage-ground she sat and stared with all her eyes at the strangers. Geoffrey, now in the ardent phase of a fresh convert, was looking like a chorister. It seemed absurd to expect him to do anything but sing divinely.

Mrs. Evans remarked, after he was gone, what a beautiful expression that young man had, and one of the daughters feared that he was going to die young.

Dorothy regarded him with little interest, but Viola's face filled her with a new emotion: she had never seen any one —out of a picture—in the least like her. What eyes she had! And with what a strange, wistful expression they wandered from face to face.

She was not a bit like a married lady, Dorothy thought. She had no little airs of importance, no accustomed little phrases, no proper sentiments.

What unusual quality was there in her voice, that made her seem miles apart from every one around her?

Of all vulgar errors, that is the vulgarest which supposes young women to be interested and attracted solely and chiefly by young men. There is no feeling more intense and romantic, in its own way, than the devotion of a girl to a woman a little older than herself. No lover ever admired more enthusiastically or worshipped more devoutly. Dorothy had already entered upon the first stage of such an experience.

She begged to be taken to call at Upton Castle, much to the surprise of her brethren, for Dorothy would usually undergo any penance rather than submit to this vexatious social usage. If Viola spoke to her she flushed up and her eyes sparkled; if Viola addressed some other person, Dorothy watched her every gesture and absorbed her every word. The object of all this devotion was absolutely unconscious. She never had the opportunity of forming those happy friendships which play so large a part in a girl's existence, and which sometimes last on through the more sombre years of womanhood as a never-failing solace

and joy, whether the life be smooth or stormy. Girls to her were strange and wonderful creatures, not to be understood. She felt shy of them and very envious, recognising in their lot what she had missed herself.

Mrs. Evans said that she hoped Mrs. Dendraith would come over to the Rectory whenever she felt inclined; tennis was always going on, and they would be delighted to see her.

Viola blushed and thanked her hostess, and wondered if she would ever have the courage to avail herself of the invitation. She had a vague yearning to take part, though only as an outsider, in the bright thoughtless life that went on in the Rectory household. Perhaps she felt instinctively that without some such medicine for the spirit, she must break down altogether.

She did venture, after much hesitation, to call one afternoon, and the welcome she received was so hearty that in a moment she felt how absurd had been her fears. The ice once broken, intercourse became quickly established between the two houses, and Dorothy was in the seventh heaven.

For Viola, however, there was always a feeling of constraint in her relations with the family; she could not throw off her reserve, though she made herself much liked among her companions by her sincerity and by the wistful gentleness of her manner. She was still very far apart from them,

even while she entered into their pastimes and tried to understand the mysterious ease and freshness of their lives. How pleasantly the talk ran on among them, interspersed with little disputes and little bursts of laughter! How simple and spontaneous it all was!

As for Geoffrey, he established himself on almost brotherly terms with the whole family; and the family quickly had to reconsider their views about him in the capacity of chorister and the probability of an early grave.

"He is one of those people who will live to be a discipline to their friends, to an aggravating old age," said Dick.

Strange to say, Dick was the member of the family with whom Viola found that she had most in common. He was inclined to be confidential, as young men often are with a sympathetic woman; and Viola, in spite of her outward coldness, was essentially sympathetic. She had suffered too much to be lacking in that womanly quality. Dick, in the innocence of his manly heart, never for a moment suspected that his companion had her own heart-breaking problems to solve, and that, where he was in perplexity and trouble, she was in despair. He cherished an ardent desire to engage in scientific pursuits, which his father thought slightly impious and distinctly unremunerative. Dick's

wishes had been opposed, and he now found himself harnessed for life to an uncongenial occupation, which left him no leisure of body or mind for the work in which he felt that he might have excelled. He was conscious of a falling off in aptitude and a falling back in knowledge, and his soul at times was full of bitterness—a bitterness which no one at home could understand. Viola did understand, or at any rate she understood what it meant to have biting regrets, and Dick found great relief in pouring out his troubles to her. The fact of communicating his trouble partly assuaged it, and he began intuitively to turn to Viola on all occasions when he desired consolation. To be thus appealed to was the one redeeming circumstance of her present life, saving her from the egotism that invariably threatens the victim of a trouble such as hers, by calling her thoughts away from herself and summoning her sympathies to the rescue of another person.

From her childhood Viola had been trained under a system of restraint and arbitrary rule. Chilled, stunted as her nature had been, it now began to put forth pale little shoots towards the light; a piece of audacity which society, in alarm, set to work at once to punish and to check. Faithful servants are never wanting to carry out such decrees.

Finding that Viola and Dick were generally companions

during the long rambles which the girls and their brother used to take on Saturday afternoons across country, the judicious mother thought fit to check the growing intimacy.

Mrs. Pellett, to do her justice, had been the first to notice it, and she had considered it her duty (never had human being duties so many and so various as Mrs. Pellett) to give a hint to the rector's wife on the subject.

"Mr. Dendraith is a good deal away," said Mrs. Pellett, "and although I am sure that your son is all that he should be, and dear Mrs. Dendraith is—ahem—a most highly principled young woman, it does not do to set people talking. There is nothing more unpleasant, and "——

And so on. Thus it happened that on Saturday afternoons, when Dick came to the Rectory from his work in town, Viola was seldom or never there.

"Why don't you ask Viola Dendraith to walk with us as she used to do?" he asked on one occasion.

"A married woman has other things to do," said Mrs. Evans.

"She can't order the dinners all day long," he objected. Mrs. Evans smiled. "Do you suppose the mistress of a house has nothing to do but to order the dinner?"

"She has to row her maids, I suppose; but I can't imagine Mrs. Dendraith doing that."

Mrs. Evans would have been wiser to let matters alone, for Dick now used often to walk over to Upton Castle on Sunday afternoons, and as Philip was seldom in, Viola and her visitor would take a walk by themselves, as if Mrs. Pellett had never been born! They used sometimes to spend a quiet hour in the ruins enjoying the sea-air and the wonderful changes in the hues of ocean and sky which could be so well seen from this romantic spot. Always they would knock at Caleb Foster's door in the old keep, to inquire for his well-being and to lure him from his stronghold for a talk. Had Mrs. Evans known what these walks and wanderings were to Viola, in her desolate life, perhaps she might have thrown off her judiciousness, at any rate for a moment of impulsive pity. The rector's wife never quite came up to Mrs. Pellett's standard of moral severity, and being conscious of this defect, she was in secret fear of Mrs. Pellett's criticism, often acting not quite on her own initiative in consequence.

"My dear," said that bulwark of morality on one memorable occasion, when she had interrupted Dick in some confidence about a love-affair, and sent him away smothering terrific imprecations—"My dear, excuse the frankness of a sincere well-wisher, but don't you think it would be wise to give that young man a hint not to come here quite so often?"

"Not so often?" repeated Viola in a dazed manner. Mrs. Pellett took her hand.

"You are inexperienced, dear Mrs. Dendraith; you don't know how careful one ought to be not to give rise to talk."

Viola gazed at her visitor in stony silence.

"So very little will do it," pursued the monitress soothingly.

"So it appears."

"Of course I say this out of a friendly desire for your welfare."

"You are very good."

"I dare say," pursued the lady, with delicate tact—"I dare say you are glad to welcome even unsuitable visitors to your house, because you lead rather a lonely life, and no doubt feel dull now and then. But you know we must not allow our little trials to turn us from the strict path of duty and prudence—I am sure you will agree with me."

Viola bowed.

"The only way to avoid being dull is to keep oneself always occupied," continued Mrs. Pellett. "Now, for example, *I* am busy from morning to night, and I don't know what it is to be dull."

"No?" said Viola.

"It is right that we should all have some occupation,

whatever may be our station. Do you take any interest in poultry?"

Viola shook her head.

"I think most people would be glad to work if only they were allowed to do what they can do well," she said.

"Ah! but it is not for us to *choose*," said Mrs. Pellett; "we have to take what is appointed for us, and simply do our duty."

Viola followed an audacious impulse.

"What *is* duty?" she inquired.

Mrs. Pellett looked startled and uneasy. Wherein lay the advantage of platitude if one was to be mentally knocked about in this manner?

"Our duty," said the lady majestically, "is the—in fact, the duty that has been given to us to perform by a Higher Power."

Viola gazed at her in silence.

"Of course," pursued Mrs. Pellett, waving aside the subject as now worked out—"of course, dear Mrs. Dendraith, we all feel that your life at present is a little quiet and dull,—your husband being so much away—but some day we hope that there will be quite a different state of things. No doubt in due time we shall hear the patter of certain little feet about the house, and then there will be no time to be dull, will there?"

Mrs. Pellett's manner was archly encouraging.

Viola seemed turned to stone. She neither moved nor spoke. She only looked at her visitor with an expression of mingled loathing and defiance, which must have pierced any shell of self-complacency less adamantine than that of Mrs. Pellett. Viola knew too well what was expected of her; a pleased embarrassment at the mention of that which she was taught in the same breath to regard as the most blessed and desirable of contingencies.

The thought of that expected embarrassment filled her with fury, and sent the waves of angry colour to her cheeks, so that she had the additional misery of knowing herself to be apparently responding with the utmost propriety, exactly according to custom. The painful flush deepened and spread over neck and brow, while Mrs. Pellett smiled approvingly, and finally made some remark that filled the cup of disgust to overflowing.

As frantic prisoners shaking their prison-bars, the words came clamouring for egress to the closely-set lips: "You are a fool; you are an idiot; you are *intolerable!*"

"Well, my dear," said the unconscious Mrs. Pellett, smiling, "we won't anticipate these joys, if you would rather not"—(Viola drew a sharp breath)—"but I thought you wouldn't mind it with me, you know, and of course it would be such a happiness and comfort to you."

Still no answer. How could she speak to such a woman without making a more than ever detestable hotch-potch of misunderstanding? How could she tell her to mind her own business, and cease from her intolerable impertinence, without losing control over herself altogether? If she let but one word escape her, Viola knew that she would behave in such a way as to make Mrs. Pellett think that she had gone mad. With a strong effort she kept silent. She had not philosophy enough to thrust aside her disgust and forget the incident. Mrs. Pellett's plain, pompous face, with its look of respectable vacuity, haunted her long afterwards.

But Mrs. Pellett was not the only offender, nor was hers the only kind of offence. Viola had to learn that, as a married woman, she was expected to listen with calmness and amusement to anecdotes and allusions which were considered sullying to the innocence of a girl. Again and again she sickened with astonished anger and misery, dreading to meet her neighbours, because among them—as she considered—she was always liable to insult. Her womanhood, her very dignity as a human being was insulted. Her state of mind was such that, at times, she might have been considered on the verge of madness; indeed, if sanity has for its standard the condition of the

average mind in similar circumstances, Viola must certainly have been pronounced to have gone far beyond that boundary-line. Marriage seemed to her nothing less than an initiation into things base and unlovely, desecrating and degrading all that in her girlhood she had been taught to reverence and to cherish. The blackness of her solitude made these wounded feelings doubly hard to bear, and the sense of humiliation became so terrible that even suicide —which her mother had taught her to place on the same level as murder—grew less heinous to her imagination, as the impulse to fling away the horrors and the indignities of life became more and more frantically importunate.

Not long after Mrs. Pellet's warning on the subject of Dick Evans, Philip happened to find him with Viola in the ruins. The look of suffering had gone for the time from her eyes, for Dick was talking to her about the sea and its silent ceaseless work of building and destruction, about the crumbling of the land along the coast, and the erection during long centuries, of great beds of chalk formed from the shells of myriads of tiny creatures,—little throbs of momentary sensation in the bosom of the ages.

The sea-breeze was blowing up fresh and blue; clouds overhead thronged across the pale sky as if inspired by some joy or passion.

Philip met Dick Evans with seeming pleasure, and the three stood talking together for a few minutes. Presently Dick went off to speak to Caleb Foster, who was at the door of the keep, sharpening a carpenter's axe upon a grindstone, and then Philip turned to his wife.

"My dear," he said, "do you know that this is the third time this week that Dick Evans has been here?"

"Yes," said Viola.

"Though the very last man in the world to be jealous, I am also the last man in the world to allow my wife to be talked about. You will be good enough in future not to go out walking with Dick Evans. Of course he can call when he likes, but there must be nothing more."

"Ah! I enjoyed those walks," said Viola in a low voice, almost as if she were speaking to herself.

Her husband gave a slight, amused smile; the remark seemed to him so *naïf.*

"You can get one of his sisters to go with you; that will do just as well, and better, from a social point of view."

An expression of despair came into her eyes, but she said nothing. Philip looked at her fixedly, and his lips gave a curious twist as he turned away with a muttered remark that he was going to walk over to Upton Court, and would be back to luncheon.

Dick presently returned with Caleb Foster, who proceeded to give an instructive dissertation upon Being and Essence, with copious illustrations from Kant and Hegel, till the solid earth seemed to Viola to swim beneath their feet, the wind and sea and the steep white cliffs to grow alike imponderable. Dick's robust animal consciousness and his absence of metaphysical instinct roused him to violent rebellion.

"In the name of common-sense, my dear sir"——

Caleb gave a sigh.

"Common-sense," he cried dejectedly,—"if you are going to appeal to common-sense, I have nothing more to say; we must at once drop the chain of logic." He opened his thin fingers, as if actually letting go that ponderous object.

"But I deny that the two things are incompatible," objected Dick.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Common-sense may be a crude sort of wisdom, but logical it is not, or I think this globe of ours would be rather less 'distracted' than we find it."

"Saved by a syllogism," observed Dick musingly.

Caleb shortly after this returned to his work, and then Dick proposed to Viola that they should go for a walk.

"I want to show you those Saxon barrows upon the downs that I spoke to you about. You said you would like to see them."

Viola coloured. Philip had forbidden her to go for a walk again with Dick. Her only strong pleasure, her only source of fresh and wholesome ideas, was to be surrendered, and at the thought, an impulse of rebellion sprang up within her, fierce and desperate. "Do they all want to drive me mad?—or wicked?"

"Will you come?" asked Dick casually, expecting her assent as a matter of course.

"Yes, I will come," she said, with set lips. But all pleasure in Dick's society had ceased. The sense of wrong-doing stalked like a spectre beside her, dogging her footsteps, go where she might. In vain the sweet wind blustered round her, in vain the untamed monster at the cliff's foot swung its vast bulk upon the complaining stones. A little fretting chain, holding her to the small and local elements of her life, pinioned her joyous impulses and sounded its familiar "chink, chink" in her ears.

"You seem tired," said the young man, checking his impetuous speed.

Had she answered as Nature dictated, she would have brought dismay into his manly bosom by bursting into

tears. The wildness of the scene, the appeal of the lark's song overhead, and of the old old song of the sea, were almost more than she could bear. She felt like an outcast from all these elemental things, an exile from the world of reality and joy.

But though her heart spoke strongly, her training was loud-voiced also. Habit triumphed over impulse.

"I am a little tired," she said; "the wind is pushing hard against us."

"Let us rest, then," Dick proposed. "The wind has long ago swept up all moisture; we can safely sit upon the grass," and he flung himself down at full length, while Viola, tired rather in mind than in body, sank wearily beside him.

Her big retriever, Triton, like an embodied Rapture, was racing the wind across the downs. Viola called to him in her sweet vibrating voice, but he did not hear until Dick's shout joined issue with the gale. Then the dog turned and came tearing back, his brown body scouring the earth in its passage. He bounded up happy and affectionate to his mistress.

"If I must part with every other friend, at least I shall always have you,—till you die," she said, with a pathetic little caress. "But you will desert me and go away into the silent land, and then"——

"You will get another Triton," said Dick, with a good-natured laugh.

"But these beautiful brown eyes will not be forgotten. Ah! where can you find a human spirit like this?"

"You are always a little hard on us poor humans," said Dick; "after all, most of us mean well enough, though perhaps we make rather a mess of the doing."

"In men and women," Viola returned, "I miss the generous, faithful soul of a creature like this. If I could meet any one—man, woman, or child—one-half as noble, I would set him on a pedestal and worship him to my life's end."

"Not a bit of it," said Dick, laughing; "you would long for a little amiable human weakness in your deity, and haul him down again—or worse still, poor fellow! leave him there in cold and solitary glory, like another Pillar Saint."

Viola shook her head.

"Look at those eyes; where can you find human eyes as beautiful?"

"Well, I know at any rate one man and one woman who surpass old Triton on that point, and curiously enough they possess just those qualities that you admire so much in him."

"Do I know the people?"

"You know one of them: Harry Lancaster."

"Oh!" said Viola abruptly.

"The other is his friend, Mrs. Lincoln. No doubt you have heard of her, as she has taken that little house belonging to your father-in-law on the coast—what is it called? Fir Lodge, or Fir Dell, or something of that sort."

"Fir Dell," said Viola. "Yes, I know about her."

"People here won't call upon her because she is separated from her husband, but I must say she seems to me a very refined, ladylike sort of woman, and I know Harry Lancaster thinks her little short of an angel; in fact, I sometimes fancy he is a little bit in love with her."

"But—but she is married!" said Viola.

Dick smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"He is just the sort of fellow to cherish 'a *grande passion*' for the unattainable."

Viola threw her arms round her dog's neck and laid her cheek against his head, so that her face was turned from her companion.

"I think I am rested now," she said presently. "Shall we go on?"

The pause seemed to have indued her with amazing strength, for her pace now rivalled Triton's, and Dick laughingly asked her if she were training for a race.

"Am I walking fast?" she inquired abruptly, slackening speed.

"You look pale," said Dick, in his kind, chivalrous way. "Have I taken you too far?"

"No, no."

"It seems to me, you might take the prize in a mile-race across country!"

They paced on in silence for some moments, then Dick said, "You have never seen Mrs. Lincoln, I suppose?"

"Never."

"She is a very curious woman,—dreadfully clever, but I like her. As for her opinions, I fear they would shock you, Mrs. Dendraith."

"Does she dissent from the Church?"

Dick stopped and broke into a shout of laughter.

"My dear Mrs. Dendraith, Mrs. Lincoln cares as much about the Church as she cares about the Upton ladies! There are rumours afloat that she is a follower of Zoroaster, or a Buddhist!"

Viola looked aghast.

"And that she worships those very ugly little figures that you see in Oriental shops. They say she buys them by the dozen."

"Impossible!"

"It is also said," Dick pursued, "that she is building herself a little temple off her drawing-room, like a conservatory, and that she means to found a Buddhist monastic system and make Harry Lancaster high priest."

"And he admires such a woman!"

"You would forgive him if you saw her."

"Never," said Viola.

Dick held out his hand to help her up the last few feet of the barrow, which stood beside two or three other hillocks on the highest point of the downs, commanding a view of the usual incredible number of counties.

Dick then began to discourse upon the probable history of these old relics of our forefathers, upon the different races that had peopled Britain: races with round heads, long heads, or coffin-shaped heads, each race having buried its dead in barrows of distinctive form, so that these burial-places told part of their story to the archæologist at the first glance. Dick went on to relate some strange legends, full of the wild poetry of northern sea-girt melancholy lands, haunted by mist and storm.

Viola leant back and listened dreamily. With her head pillowed upon the soft grass, she could watch the clouds drifting and melting and streaming, wind-intoxicated, across

the heavens. Scarcely was the earth visible at all; she grew conscious only of a brilliant circle of blue hills and a shimmer of universal light. The sense of trouble faded away; Fate had granted a moment's amnesty.

Viola heaved a deep sigh. The vividness of her personality was dimmed; its edges lost their sharpness, and her consciousness seemed to spread out and extend into the outlying world of air and sunshine, and the unlimited ether that lay above.

The voice of the story-teller ceased, and the windy silence of the downs closed softly round about. Dick, after a few minutes, looked at his companion.

"Are you asleep?"

"Yes, and dreaming." She did not move, but lay with closed eyes peacefully.

"May I know your dream?"

"It was of wind and waves—of a world where there is romance and happiness and rest;—where"—Viola suddenly raised her head and sat upright, the peace all gone from her face—"and where there are no Mrs. Pelletts."

Dick laughed.

"Why, Mrs. Dendraith, you are not so good, after all, as I thought you! Mrs. Lincoln might rebel against Mrs. Pellett, but *you!*—and *apropos* of that, I fear we shall

have to be going; I see we have been out for three hours! Remember you have public opinion to consider, a position to keep up, and Mrs. Pellett to confront."

"If I committed a murder," exclaimed Viola, as she sprang to her feet, "I should not think it necessary to apologise to Mrs. Pellett!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

GUIDE, PHILOSOPHER, AND FRIEND.

As Philip was not home to luncheon on that day of iniquity, he did not discover his wife's act of insubordination till she took it upon herself to inform him; and though very angry at the moment of confession, he was disarmed by her frankness.

"Don't let this happen again, however," he said. "I seldom lay commands upon you, but when I do, I mean them to be obeyed."

The walks thenceforth were given up, and Dick had to content himself with paying formal calls at Upton Castle, when he found Viola nervous and constrained, looking paler and more lifeless each time he came.

"I begin to half-believe in Mrs. Pellett's theory about the decline," he said anxiously to his mother, who shook her head, and feared that the poor young thing had not long to live.

On one occasion Viola called at the Rectory immediately

after Mrs. Pellett's departure, and found her devoted admirer Dorothy, fuming with indignation.

It seemed that Mrs. Pellett, with her usual enlarged views about duty, had just returned from an incursion upon the Manor-House, where she had been kindly mentioning to Mrs. Sedley what she and many others at Upton thought about dear Viola's sad appearance.

The Bulwark (as Harry Lancaster used to call her) had dropped in on her way back, to explain to her friends at the Rectory how much trouble she had been taking on Viola's behalf. Dorothy stamped her foot.

"I was burning to throw an antimacassar at her head!" exclaimed that impulsive young person; "the way she sat there swelling with importance and propriety—ugh! I wish she had burst, like the frog in the fable—and then we should have heard no more about her!"

"Oh! consummation devoutly to be wished!" cried Dick.

"Fancy taking the trouble to go all that way just to see Mrs. Sedley and frighten her out of her wits—the old idiot!"

This last epithet appeared so pointedly to apply to Mrs. Sedley that Dorothy stammered an explanation.

"I suppose I ought to be grateful to Mrs. Pellett," said Viola, "but I am not. I—I *hate* Mrs. Pellett."

Dorothy stared for a moment, and then broke out into laughter and embraces.

"Hurray!" she called out at the top of her voice. "I thought you couldn't hate any one!"

Viola gave a little "Oh!" that was very expressive.

"Can you hate with all your mind, and with all your soul, and with all your heart?" inquired Dorothy.

"I fear I can."

"So much the better," said Dorothy, after an astonished pause; "people who can love can always hate."

"But they oughtn't to," said Viola.

Theologically, Dorothy agreed, but humanly, she didn't see it.

"If people are nasty," she argued, "they are made to be hated."

Viola rather demurred at this, but Dorothy urged that (for instance) sheep and cattle, being good to eat, are meant by a considerate Providence to be eaten (her father had explained that in his sermon last Sunday); therefore, by analogy, people who are suitable for being hated are meant to be hated. No one could love a black-beetle, and no one could love Mrs. Pellett (except her husband). Dorothy, in an awed whisper, even went so far as to say that she didn't think God Himself could love Mrs. Pellett!

The girl's expressions of devotion to Viola were as energetic as her denouncement of her *bête noir.*

"I do love you so, there is nothing in the world that I wouldn't do for you. I wish you would try me."

"Supposing I did something very wicked."

"You *couldn't!*" cried Dorothy.

"But suppose it for a moment."

"Still I should love you and stick to you through thick and thin. It is impossible for you to be you and for me not to love you."

"Then I am not quite alone in the world!" Viola exclaimed.

"Alone in the world! Why, every one that knows you thinks you are an angel!"

"Dick, for instance?"

"Oh! Dick *loves* you so," pursued Dorothy with ardour. "Do you love Dick?"

"Almost," said Viola, with a smile; and Dorothy thenceforth went about imparting the interesting information that Dick and Viola loved each other to distraction.

Mrs. Pellett's interposition (interference, Dorothy called it) was, of course, effectual in raising Mrs. Sedley's fears. Her daughter found it very difficult to lull her suspicion

that something was wrong, however careful she might be to seem in good health and spirits.

"I assure you I am quite well," Viola used to say again and again, but her looks belied her words.

Mrs. Barber's compliments fell thick and fast. The two never met but the housekeeper would exclaim in sepulchral tones, "Well, ma'am, you *do* look ill-disposed, that you do!"

Though Dorothy's assertion, that every one in Upton thought Viola an angel, was not quite accurate, her quiet, unassuming manner and gentle expression had disarmed the criticism even of that village, severely just!

"The present topic of conversation here," Adrienne Lancaster wrote to her brother, who was now with his regiment in Ireland, "is Mrs. Philip Dendraith. She is thought nice-looking and ladylike, but too quiet. She certainly is quiet, but I feel sure there is something in her a little out of the ordinary. I am determined to know her better; it will not be difficult, as she is so often at the Rectory. I doubt if she is quite happy; though, if she is not, it is probably her own fault; some people lack the right temperament for happiness. Perhaps you will say that she lacks the right *husband*, but I fancy happiness is a thing which a husband can neither give nor take away."

Adrienne subsequently carried out her intention of becoming more intimate with Mrs. Dendraith, but the manner in which the friendship was cemented differed materially from her own forecasts.

Matters had been going rather slowly, for Viola's reserve seemed invincible, when something happened which shook things out of their sluggish course.

"Since my last letter, dear Harry," wrote Adrienne, "a most astonishing event has happened; *I have had a proposal!*—and from whom do you think, of all people in the world?—from—I wish I could see your face when you read this—from Bob Hunter! Think of it: Bob, with all his jokes and his acres, at my feet! Perhaps I oughtn't to tell you, but it was too comic an episode to keep to myself. Augusta says it would scarcely be Christian."

Bob Hunter was a wealthy young man with a property at about eight miles from Upton. Most people said he was mad; a few said he was clever, perhaps because he had attained so much celebrity as a skilful baffler of designing mothers. These doomed ones he so overwhelmed with quips and quirks and mad sayings, so confused with pun interlaced with pun, meaning hooked into meaning, that they lost all hope and presence of mind.

At one of the Rectory tennis-parties Viola found her

mental horizon much enlarged by an introduction to this incredibly eccentric creature. There is nothing to equal an abnormal human being for putting to rout one's narrow preconceptions. Bob was a lank and weedy young man, with a long pale ugly face, colourless hair and eyelashes. Life to him was one long farce. Viola felt as if she had come in contact with a being from another sphere. She had an opportunity of watching him "confounding the knavish tricks" of Mrs. Featherstone, a county lady with a hunting daughter to marry, both veterans retiring from the field utterly routed.

"She that captures Bob Hunter," that agile person remarked after a little caper of jubilation on the tennis-court, "must be swifter than Atalanta."

"Ah! Mr. Hunter," said Adrienne, "if some aspirant were only wise enough to avoid pursuing you, you would come and tamely lay yourself down at her feet!"

Bob looked at her gravely, pirouetted slightly, according to his custom, and danced off to the other end of the lawn.

Later in the afternoon Adrienne and Viola were strolling together in a retired part of the garden. Adrienne had been trying to draw Viola out, and Viola was showing a perverse inclination to give her new acquaintance the benefit of her ideas about the difference between the tem-

perature of to-day and the temperature of the day before yesterday.

They were not too much engrossed in their meteorological discussion to become aware of the approach of Bob Hunter. He came forward, stepping it in little triplets and hailing the two ladies, as they established themselves on a rustic-seat at the end of the path, with an appropriate quotation from the poets.

This was all in his usual manner, and caused Adrienne no surprise, but what followed fairly took her breath away, and made Viola grow hot and cold from sheer amazement.

"Wise and lovely one," said Bob, addressing Adrienne, "your words are full of the wisdom of the Egyptians. She that pursueth not arriveth at the goal; she that hunteth is taken in the snare of the fowler, and the birds of the air laugh her to scorn. Julia Featherstone, that accursed damsel, shall be humbled. Adrienne Lancaster, because that she hath passed by on the other side, verily she shall be exalted. Not she, but her adorer taketh the lowest place. Even according unto his word he layeth himself (irrespective of a clay soil) at her feet." And before a remonstrance could be uttered Bob Hunter was sprawling at full length on the ground.

"Mr. Hunter, for Heaven's sake, get up!" exclaimed Adrienne. "You are really too ridiculous!"

"Nay, cruel one, but I love you," remarked Bob in an explanatory manner. "(No, don't go, PLEASE, Mrs. Dendraith, I prefer to have an umpire on these occasions.) Adrienne, at your feet, I lay myself and all that I possess. Will you have me and my appurtenances?"

"Do get up, Mr. Hunter."

"Give me your hand, then?"

"Supposing some of the tennis-players were to come and see you in this ridiculous attitude."

"I thought it was graceful," said Bob, craning his neck so as to get a view of himself. "Oh, you who abound in grace, yet have no grace for me, I will arise and go to my Featherstone!"

"Pray do."

"What! a woman and not jealous!"

He sprang ardently to his feet. "Still more am I yours; still more must I worship this rare and charming bird!"

He began to skip about and execute elaborate steps, talking all the time, and showering puns, quotations, and allusions upon his astonished audience. He kissed Adrienne's hand, he called her "adamantine," he became like Irving in "Hamlet."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Adrienne, "was there ever such a proposal before in history?"

By this time she was laughing helplessly, and the more she laughed the more extravagantly Bob Hunter behaved.

Yet he managed to make her understand that he meant his proposal seriously, and intended to persevere in his eccentric suit till she gave in.

"Of course it is a 'splendid chance' for me," said Adrienne rather bitterly, when her wooer had at last consented to pirouette back to the tennis-ground. "Miss Featherstone and her mother have been angling for him for years, and Miss Featherstone has a dozen 'chances' (as they are flatteringly called) to my one. Mother would be wild if she knew I had refused him, and all my counsellors, male and female, would hold up hands of dismay at my folly. I wonder whether they are right, or I. If I don't marry, I shall live on in this dead, foolish, gossiping little village, trying to make two ends meet and talking empty nonsense with my neighbours. I have no place in life, no interest; my time is swallowed up in a mere struggle with petty household details, a struggle to keep up appearances and to live 'as becomes our station.' My mother's whole existence has become absorbed in that effort, and mine too. If I married"——

She paused and sighed.

"If I married, I suppose petty details of another kind would take up my time; I should have to gossip and talk nonsense perhaps on a larger scale, and then"——

"And then you would have to learn to smile when people insulted you," Viola put in, "and to smile again when they took you by the arm and whispered loathsome things in your ear; and again to smile when"—her voice broke—"when you realised that you had given up all right to resent what they said, for in accepting your position you had accepted all these things, and as many more—this side of madness—as might present themselves for your endurance."

Viola was almost breathless when she stopped speaking.

"*Mrs. Dendraith!*" exclaimed Adrienne in indescribable amazement.

"Miss Lancaster!" said Viola, and the two women stood facing one another in the pathway.

"I don't think you take things in quite the right spirit," observed Adrienne at length, her theories getting the better of a first sympathetic impulse; "a woman can make marriage into a holy of holies. Think how sacred an office it may be; how a woman may serve and minister, and make her life one long, lovely self-sacrifice."

Viola was shivering from head to foot, so that she could not answer.

"Believe me, there is no position in which opportunities for heroism do not exist, but the position of wife and mother has always been, and surely always will be, the best and noblest and holiest that a woman can fill."

Viola shuddered.

"I am very wicked, I know," she said; "I can't be patient under insult, and to be married seems to be the endurance of one long insult, and to rob one of the very right to resent it."

"I don't understand," cried Adrienne. "I dare say people are vulgar and impertinent, but what does that matter, after all?"

Viola turned away. She could not speak of it further, and Adrienne's succeeding remarks were received without opposition, but without response. This conversation, however, was the beginning of a closer acquaintance. Adrienne studied her new friend, and soon formed a neat compact little judgment about her which satisfied herself, and was very serviceable for everyday use, since Viola never showed enough of herself to invalidate the theory.

Miss Lancaster thought that she might have influence

for good over her new friend, and being always zealous in well-doing, she tore herself occasionally from her numerous home duties to spend a day or two at Upton Castle. The mentor then noticed with approval, Viola's continual self-suppression, her cheerfulness in her mother's presence, her disregard of headaches and other signs of ill-health, and her evident determination to do her duty.

But this was mere stoicism and power of will, not the smiling acceptance of troubles, the sweet welcoming of tribulation, which delighted Adrienne's dutiful soul.

"It is a great comfort," said that adviser judiciously—"it is a great comfort to think that, however one may be placed, duty is never far to seek. Life is full of bitter disappointments" (the speaker sighed heavily), "and there is much pain and anxiety to bear, but if we keep up a brave heart, and do well what lies to our hands, we shall assuredly feel a quiet joy and satisfaction which nothing else in this world can give. Do you not find it so?"

"A quiet joy and satisfaction?" inquired Viola, turning her hungry, melancholy eyes upon her companion.

That look seemed to be answer enough, for Adrienne took her hand and said earnestly, "I fear, dear Viola, that you are not so happy as you might be; I see there are sad things in your lot, as there are in most lots; yet I think

there are elements of happiness too, if you would take advantage of them. Your husband is fond of you"——

The speaker paused, in case Viola should have anything to say on this head, but she answered nothing, and Adrienne continued—

"He is ready to give you anything you desire; you have a comfortable, even luxurious home, and no anxiety about money matters. Ah! no one knows what that means except those who *have* such anxiety. Viola, I sometimes, in my weak moments, feel inclined to ask if it is worth while struggling on, with these never-ceasing little economies, these never-ceasing efforts to make one shilling play the part of two. But then come little solaces and pleasures, and after the fit of depression, you pluck up a brave heart again and go on. After all, it is your duty, and that makes it possible and right." Viola assented.

"I don't tell you about my own petty griefs except to let you see that you have companions in trouble all around you."

"I never doubted it for a moment."

"And that you are spared a very great deal of ceaseless worry by having no anxiety with regard to these odious pounds, shillings, and pence."

There was a long pause. Then Viola made a remark not at all in the spirit which Adrienne had intended to call forth.

"I really don't see what is the use of our all coming into the world to struggle and battle in this way; it is so very —ridiculous."

"I don't think so," Adrienne returned hastily; "there is not one of us but can do some little good in the world, if he will only use his opportunities."

"If we all *can*, we all don't; I mean, we don't all," said Viola, "and the few that do a little good are overbalanced by the many that do a little harm. Of course one must do one's duty, but I feel sometimes as if it was altogether hopeless and useless."

Adrienne's orthodox views on this point had ferreted out of their hiding-places Viola's secret heresies. She was alarmed at herself as soon as the words were uttered, and meekly accepted Adrienne's next argument without a word of dissent.

"It is not a hopeless struggle, dear Viola, if once we realise the beauty and the blessedness of *sacrifice*. That is the key to all the terrible problems of life; that alone makes us understand—if but dimly—that the highest good is to be got out of pain, and that the most blessed life is the life of sorrow."

Viola had it on her lips to say, "Then we ought to inflict upon one another as much sorrow as we can, in order

that we may all quickly attain blessedness," but she changed her mind and gave a hurried murmur of acquiescence.

Adrienne little guessed what demons of doubt and fear she had raised by her 'judicious' feminine influence.

All this time Bob Hunter, in the most persevering manner, was pursuing his eccentric suit. Before long Mrs. Dixie became joyfully aware of what had happened, and she was now making her daughter's life a burden to her by urgent entreaties to accept the advantageous proposal. When Adrienne sadly but firmly refused, the old lady sought and obtained sympathy from the rector's wife, in her bitter disappointment. As for Mrs. Pellett, she thought Adrienne's conduct was wanting in principle. If her poor dear mother's death were to be hastened by this ridiculous refusal, Mrs. Pellett hoped that Adrienne would not be overwhelmed with life-long remorse—she sincerely hoped that she would not suffer in that excruciating manner! Adrienne was deeply troubled. Her mother had worried herself ill, and Bob kept coming and coming to open the sore afresh.

"Very likely it is your last chance," said Mrs. Dixie tearfully; "we see so few people in this retired village; and what is to become of you after I am gone if you do not make a home for yourself now? O Adrienne! you know

the fate of an unmarried woman who has to make her own living! Don't sadden my declining years by the thought that I must leave you alone in the world, and penniless."

Adrienne shivered. All that her mother said was so ghastly true! Marriage without love, or——

"Viola, under any conceivable circumstances, would you have married Bob Hunter?"

"Yes, under *some* conceivable circumstances," Viola replied, "and I expect so would you and most women. My husband says that every woman has her price."

"But you don't believe that, surely!" exclaimed Miss Lancaster, much shocked.

"I am afraid I do," said Viola.

Her companion gazed at her searchingly.

"You mean that every woman would marry for money or position if only she were offered money and position enough?"

"Oh no; different women sell themselves for different things: some for money and position; some for money and position for their relatives, some for the highness of another person—yes, I think that every woman has her price."

"It seems almost a crime to marry without love," said Adrienne gravely.

Viola paused.

"It may sometimes be a crime to refuse to marry without love," she suggested.

"Never—unless perhaps some one's life were at stake—and even then—— Well, it is a difficult question. If it *is* a crime to marry for money, the punishment must be awful."

There was a long significant pause.

"How difficult it sometimes is to clearly see one's duty!" exclaimed Adrienne. (Only a few days ago she had talked so glibly and comfortably about duty.) "Is it purity of motive or is it egotism that makes a woman shrink from marrying to please her relations?"

"Well may she shrink!" cried Viola.

"Yet I do believe firmly," said Adrienne, "that the domestic life and its interests call out a woman's best qualities; that before she marries she has scarcely lived."

Viola was silent.

"If one could only be married without having a husband!" exclaimed Adrienne. He is the drawback! Poor Bob! he would keep one in jokes, wouldn't he. But oh! the awfulness of having that creature perpetually about one! I like to be able to look up to a man."

"Yes; but it is so difficult," said Viola naïvely, at which her companion laughed.

Time went on, and Bob continued to press his suit.

Mrs. Pellett, the indefatigable, one day electrified Upton by the information that she had seen Mr. Hunter going up the avenue of Fir Dell to call on "that Mrs. Lincoln."

"This comes of not saying 'yes' when she had a chance," said Mrs. Pellett. "Perhaps she'll see how silly she was now that it may be too late."

"Viola, the necessity for decision has been removed from me," said Adrienne. "Bob Hunter has deserted me for Mrs. Lincoln."

Viola turned pale.

"I wish that woman had never come here!" she exclaimed.

"So do I," assented Adrienne, "for more reasons than—Bob Hunter. It is strange how unprincipled women seem to have a hold over men which good women seldom achieve."

Adrienne ran over the list of good women: Mrs. Evans, Mrs. Dixie, Mrs. Sedley, Mrs. Pellett,—and shook her head.

"You wouldn't suspect my brother Harry of being led astray by a bad woman, and yet he sits at Mrs. Lincoln's feet; at least he used to do so. I am thankful to say that they have not met for some time, as far as I know, for Harry's regiment has been quartered in Ireland. I sadly fear he is deeply attached to her;—of course, this is between ourselves. It has long been a great trouble to me. Poor Harry! he is such a fine, generous, passionate crea-

ture that when he once loves, it is like tearing his heart out to deprive him of his ideal. I, like you, wish to Heaven the woman had never come here!"

"She must be very wicked," said Viola.

"Very wanting in womanly feeling at any rate," Adrienne amended. "I cannot understand a self-respecting woman allowing herself to be talked about in the way Mrs. Lincoln is talked about. I would undergo tortures rather than that."

"You would rather submit to be talked *to* as a woman is talked to (and about) after she is married," suggested Viola, with a vivid flush. "I can't say that I think, as far as the talking is concerned, that one gains so much by being thought respectable."

"Oh! my dear Viola, for Heaven's sake don't say such things; it grieves me to hear you!"

As Adrienne herself had not been guiltless of little vulgarities which Viola disliked and resented, no answer was forthcoming to this remonstrance.

Things were going on very badly at the Castle just at present. Philip was always at home, and this for Viola meant a greater amount of suffering. There was no respite. The day was dull and weary, and filled with a thousand annoyances, great and small; but the night—the time for solitude, stillness and repose, the time to build up strength

and draw in new hope and peace—the night was a living hell!

She might never be alone, never feel that she absolutely possessed herself. Her very thoughts were scarcely free. Freedom was an unknown word; the only words that ruled in that red-hot Purgatory were right, duty, submission.

What inmate of the harem, she used to wonder, endured slavery more absolute than this? If she could but tear out heart and soul, so that she remained a mere shell, animate but not sentient, and let *that* stay and be housekeeper, wife, mother, whatever was wanted. It would play the part better than she played it, and there would be none of this hatred and loathing, this sinful, invincible shrinking from her accepted duties. What heaven could be worth such a price? what hell worse than the hell which now devoured her?

She felt as if she must shriek or blaspheme; as if her very personality must blaze up and be consumed in the flames of a swift-developed madness.

She was utterly alone—cut off from human help; for even Harry's interest had been led elsewhere. The protecting hand whose finger-tips had been slowly slipping away, was now quite withdrawn. The solitude was profound. A punishment this, thought Viola, for daring to let her mind dwell upon the memories of those scenes before

her marriage, when Harry had tried so hard to save her. The longing for unconsciousness, for death, became unappeasable: to be mercifully wafted away to some quiet region where there was no heartache, no indignity, no altar where the souls and bodies of women were offered up in sacrifice, while the honourable and the respected of the earth danced round, singing psalms of triumph. What though that gentle world were canopied with clouds shutting out the sunshine of the earth? What though vapours still and sullen hovered there, lulling the spirit in a dreamless rest? The sweetness of life, the glory of the world, was not for her; welcome then, the land of shadows and of silence, where sorrow was laid to sleep and the throb of misery ceased. Not even the fear that it was wicked to long so for what Heaven had not willed, could overcome the yearning.

It seemed at times as if things *could* not go on much longer in their present course, and yet it was evident that there could be no sudden break. Mrs. Sedley had done her work too well.

There were at this time many small difficulties of the petty and worrying order to contend with. Mrs. Barber was perpetually coming to Viola with discouraging stories about the household affairs, stories always given in the most majestic language, which, like all other luxuries, had

to be paid for, and Mrs. Barber's language was paid for ruinously in that commodity of undetermined value that we call time. Instead of trying to set matters right, she talked about how they went wrong, and the domestic machinery began to groan and creak unpleasantly. This did not tend to improve matters between husband and wife; Philip was not used to lying upon crumpled rose-leaves, and he frankly told his wife that if she could make herself neither agreeable nor useful, he really failed to see what she was there for.

"Not for my own pleasure, assuredly," Viola had once been goaded into replying.

"I'll be damned if it's for mine, then!" cried Philip, with a snarl.

"Then let me go!"

"Where to, may I ask?" He gave a loud laugh.

He had a newspaper in his hand, which, with insolent coolness, he was reading at intervals.

"That does not matter, so long as I may but go."

He gave a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders.

"How difficult it is to make you realise your position!" he said. "Do you think that you have only yourself to consult? Let me remind you that you bear *my name*; that, in fact (to speak so that you can understand), it is branded

upon you, and by that brand I can claim you and restrain you wherever you may be, so long as you live. *Now* are matters clear to you?"

She turned very white, but answered seemingly without emotion, "Quite clear; you hold over me a power of more than life and death. You can treat me as you choose, for open resistance (even if I could resort to it) would mean for me—ruin. I am at your mercy. I think, however, that, in common fairness, all this ought to have been explained to me before I married."

"My dear," said Philip, "a man can get a woman to marry him on any terms. It is her own look-out if she doesn't know what marriage involves. She ought to find out. But do you suppose finding out would stop a woman from marrying? Not a bit of it; not if she found out that she would have to throw herself on her husband's funeral pyre like an Indian widow! These are plain facts, my dear; and any woman of the world will tell you the same thing. Besides, who are you, to be discontented with what satisfies other women? But I am tired of this subject. Be good enough to give a little attention to your household duties for the future, and spare me further hysterics."

He turned away and buried himself in the paper.

For a moment Viola stood before him hesitating, as, if

she intended to say something more, but apparently changing her mind, she walked slowly away.

If Philip had brought all the powers of his mind to bear upon the subject for the next year, he would never have guessed the feeling that made his wife at once seek Mrs. Barber and consult with her seriously as to the means of effecting an improvement in the state of the domestic affairs.

It was the first time that the mistress of the house had actively used her authority, and it greatly startled Mrs. Barber. That high functionary of course thought that any suggested change was impossible, but in course of time she became convinced that it had to be made, and reluctantly set about the task.

Philip, some time later, noticing that his wishes had been carried out minutely, gave an approving nod to his wife, and remarked that he was glad to see that she had taken his advice to heart and turned over a new leaf.

"How shall I reward you for this sensible conduct, my dear?"

"I want no reward, thank you; I am glad you are pleased."

"What *do* you want, then?" demanded Philip, with a frown.

"Nothing."

"So be it. I had a little present I was going to give you, a present that would make the eyes of most wives glisten; but since you want nothing you shall have nothing."

He put back the red leather case which he had brought out of his pocket and went on with his breakfast.

"If you would condescend to ask me for this confounded trinket, and take a little interest in it, I would give it you even now," said Philip after a long silence. "I am not a bear or a tyrant, whatever you may say."

"I never said you were either."

"Well, will you ask me for this thing."

"I cannot accept it as a reward for anything I may have done that pleases you," said Viola, flushing.

"What a mad woman you are! And pray why not?"

"I have only done what I thought myself bound in duty to do."

"But if I choose to show that I am pleased with you"——

Viola shook her head. Unluckily for herself she had the old Puritan spirit largely developed. She understood principle but not compromise, duty but not diplomacy. She had no perception of character, and therefore no instinct to adapt herself. It never occurred to her that a man like Philip could be wounded as well as angry, and that she was

inflexibly rejecting the only overtures of peace which he knew how to make.

"As a reward I cannot accept it," she repeated.

"Idiot!"

Philip took the case again out of his pocket, opened it, and laid it on the table. It contained a star of magnificent brilliants, gleaming and scintillating upon their bed of sapphire velvet.

He watched her face.

"Do you like it?"

"It is lovely."

"Do you wish to have it?" She shook her head.

"And what if I say that you *must* have it?"

"You have already clearly explained to me that I have no choice but to obey you; moreover, it has always been my desire to obey you to the best of my ability."

"Very well then; take it, and wear it, if you please."

He handed her the case, which she took.

"I am tired of this sort of thing, let me tell you, Viola," he went on. "It is time that you should clearly understand your position as my wife, and then perhaps you will see that your best policy is conciliation, not defiance."

"I have never been defiant."

"You have certainly never been conciliating!" he ex-

claimed. "A woman can generally get her own way with a man (within limits) if she knows how to manage. You are not half-clever."

Viola gave a wintry little smile and a faint shrug of the shoulders.

"Now, you understand that I want you to *wear* that star. I don't give it you to be locked away in some old drawer and never seen. It will look well in your hair."

"I will do what you wish," she said.

Philip made an impatient movement.

"I don't understand you," he exclaimed. "You are as pig-headed"—— Viola looked up.

"You talk about making me understand my position," she said, "but it seems to me that I understand it very well. I am—in your own words—branded with your name. It gives you a claim over me so long as I live. I understand that quite clearly. If I were to leave you, you could make life impossible to me; I have no more illusions. I see and understand. It is just because I *do* see and understand that I offend you. You would have me act two parts at the same time. That cannot be, even at *your* command. You are my husband—you married me in the face of my repeated assurance that I did not wish to marry you—you have thus become my master, and, if you choose,

my tyrant—I am at your mercy. In these circumstances, how can you expect from me anything except deference and obedience? If you are my master now and for ever, you cannot hope to establish any other relation between us. You take your stand on your authority, and there you must remain."

Philip rose slowly and went to the fireplace.

"It may surprise you to learn that you talk damned nonsense, my dear," he said in his suavest tones.

"Then perhaps I had better hold my tongue," she answered.

Philip shrugged his shoulders.

"It is to be hoped that you will have children," he said, with an intonation that made her shrink as if she had been touched with hot iron. "*They* would soon bring you to your senses."

"Do you find you are generally able to foretell how circumstances will affect me?" she asked coldly.

"I have some knowledge of human nature," he replied, "and I have kept my eyes open. A married woman who has no children may give her husband trouble, but the first baby infallibly drives the nonsense out of her. After that the game is in his hands. She has to behave rationally for the child's sake."

Philip gave a slight smile as he said it, which was subtly, profoundly wounding.

"If you are determined to deprive me of every grain of self-respect, if you are resolved to humiliate me to the very dust," said Viola, in a low voice full of suppressed passion, "it may please you to know that I recognise my utter helplessness to resist you even in *that*. While my mother is alive "—— she stopped abruptly.

"While your mother is alive you are afraid to make a scandal in her respectable family," said Philip. "Very right and very wise, my dear. I drink to your respected mother's very good health, and may her days be long in the land."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WEST WING.

A LARGE portion of Upton Castle had remained uninhabited. Sir Philip made various jocular allusions to the size of the family which might find accommodation in the great deserted rooms of the west wing, and these allusions were, for some recondite reason, considered exceedingly amusing. In fact, the west wing had become a sort of standing joke among the people of Upton, who generally made one last a long time, and took care that it should not be of a subtle or impersonal character; *that* might cause an epidemic of headaches. A pleasantry which required one to think was as bad, in the eyes of the Upton circle, as a play that made demands on one's pocket-handkerchief.

Of course, Viola was not allowed to miss the sweet savour of the Upton joke. Philip repeated it to her with an insolent laugh, and added one or two apposite remarks, which Viola would willingly have burnt out of her brain

with hot irons, so that their imprint might be eternally erased.

That vast deserted wing over which Upton made merry, had become her favourite haunt in the winter afternoons, when the closing in of the light made work or reading impossible, and the stillness of the dusk creeping over the sea brought a tired lull to the sense of unappeasable misery.

The west wing was nearest to the ruin, and from the windows of its vast old rooms one could look almost into the keep, where Viola often used to see Caleb working before his doorstep, until the darkness crept up and forced him to desist. Sometimes she would go out and have a talk with him, which she always found a great relief, for Caleb could arrest her own painful thoughts, and carry her away into his cold, clear, sorrowless world of "pure reason." But often Viola was too wretched to seek this respite; the solitude which was driving her troubles deeper and deeper into her soul was becoming daily more and more of a necessity. She shrank at the approach of her fellow-creatures, from whom something hurtful, foolish, detestable, might, it seemed, always be expected. Like some animal accustomed to rough handling, she flinched even when no blow was intended. The old rooms of the

west wing were dark and dim, as if with the shadows of many years. They seemed to Viola to conceal a haunting danger, an unknown mysterious danger, hanging like a curse over the house.

No one knew of her visits to this region of silence and shadows; she was supposed by the household to have gone out with Triton or perhaps with Dorothy Evans, who sometimes accompanied her on her interminable rambles. She kept her secret jealously, stealing in unobserved by the door leading on to the terrace, and creeping up the great staircase, till she found herself, safe and alone, in the long corridors out of which opened the innumerable dusty, musty rooms. She scarcely dared to breathe as she moved with careful footsteps over the oaken floors, half-expecting to see some form emerge from the gathering shadows or rise up from the great four-post bedsteads, whose dark canopies must be embellished (as she fancied) with the phantasmagoria of human dreams. Among the old rooms was one called the Death Chamber, which especially fascinated her. Here, generation after generation, the Dendraiths had died, sometimes calmly under the shadows of the great black bedstead; once by violence.

In examining a fantastically carved cabinet which stood near the mantelpiece, Viola discovered a number of old

letters, written in the last century by the unhappy lady whose story Philip had told on that fatal day long ago. Many other musty treasures came to light: a bit of faded ribbon, a silver thimble and a piece of dim silken embroidery, with one of its miraculous flowers of unknown genus half-finished, the threaded needle stuck into the silk, as if the work had just been laid down. What were the fifty or a hundred years that had passed since the skilful fingers touched that dainty piece of embroidery? A mere fiction, an unreality.

The two realities: the life of that bygone lady, and that of her not less unhappy successor,—seemed to annihilate between them the empty phantom Time and to touch each other closely. The little relics of everyday occupations which had lain there undisturbed since their owner passed away, spoke of her so loudly that Viola felt as if she had known the woman who had slept and dreamt and, alas! wept in this old room; who had woven her sorrow into silken devices, and died with the grief still in her soul, the embroidered flowers of Paradise still uncompleted. Viola took possession of the key of this cabinet, and mastered the secret of the hiding-place of the treasures. On one windy afternoon, in the twilight, she stole up to the old room, taking with her a small narrow packet. She

went first to the window and looked out. The waves were rolling one after the other over the expanse of grey waters: ocean's battalions making onslaught against the shore. How calm, how beneficent these same waters had looked on a certain summer afternoon!—that afternoon when she might have averted her fate, had she been willing to fling off the claims of conscience. Could it be that she regretted having done her duty? She leant her head desolately against the window-sill. Adrienne had spoken of the quiet joy and satisfaction that follows duty performed, but Viola felt nothing but a passionate misery to which she saw no possible end. Even if release came to-morrow, she felt that her soul was seared and branded for life, and that at best there was nothing left for her but to die. Never since her childhood had she been hopeful or light-hearted: now it was impossible to expect relief. There were no stores of garnered joy to fall back upon in her present trouble. This was like a sudden savage tightening of a cord that for years had been cutting into the flesh, wearing away the powers of rebound and the powers of enjoyment, just at the time when these should have been growing and accumulating.

Mrs. Sedley's long life of persistent self-neglect and self-deterioration was bearing its fruit, twenty and a hundred

fold : the inevitable punishment, when it came, was heavy, and it fell on innocent shoulders.

Viola remained at the window watching the waves as they rolled over, melancholy, dreary, unceasing. Such were the movements of human destiny, the restless everlasting labour without aim or hope. What was this ceaseless turmoil of the ocean but a weary response to the perpetual stimulus of a blind necessity? What did these eternal waves achieve, as they rose and sank and rose again, expending their force merely upon their own birth-element, effecting nothing? Caleb Foster said that in the course of ages they wore away the land by their ceaseless fretting, and added thus a few miles to the dominion of the ocean.

Perhaps the human waves were also wearing something away with their repeated onslaughts, adding thus to the dominion of—*what?* That was the awful question. And in any case was it worth while?

Another dangerous thought came : What if all that we are told about Providence be the offspring of human imagination, part of our blind response to the goad that drives us all to live and think and feel and strive, till the breath goes out of us and the life-fever is stilled?

Oh! what would her mother say to such wild questions? What would even Adrienne say? Viola felt as if she were

sinking deeper into some black nightmare gulf whence there was no returning; an ante-chamber leading by a long narrowing passage to the regions of the damned. She looked round her at the sinister dusk gathering and thickening in the corners of the silent room, at the vast oak bedstead and the carved cabinet, with its grinning faces.

She touched the packet she held in her hand with a singular gesture, and stood looking down at it steadily. A wave of colour spread over her face, and her eyes lighted up. She drew away the paper wrappings and disclosed the knife which Harry Lancaster had given her on her wedding-day, and her husband had forbidden her to keep. Evidently in this one particular she had failed in obedience. She looked at the ornament attentively, examined it this side and that, and ran her finger along the steel. Viola thought of Harry's impassioned words of warning before her marriage, and it occurred to her swiftly in passing, that he might have given her the thing not quite without a purpose! But the idea was dismissed as preposterous.

Harry! How suddenly he vanished into the great silence which engulfs so many who seem to have made themselves part and parcel of our lives. What was he doing, and thinking? Scarcely a word of his had been

forgotten. He had succeeded in weaving himself into Viola's memories, as the bygone Lady Dendraith had woven her troubles into her silken impossible flowers. And he too had left the threaded needle in the silk, and gone away and left the work unfinished. Did he ever think of her now? Did he still—— Viola frowned and hurried away from the window, trying to banish that question from her mind. Did he love her still? Of course not; she was no longer free; he had ceased loving her as soon as she became Philip's wife. Harry would not be so wicked as to let his passion cross the adamantine marriage boundary. No; she must go through the world without his love, as she had elected to do; it was the maddest folly to permit her thoughts to wander back to the old times which could never be recalled. She wondered how she would feel if Harry were to walk into the room at this moment. Her heart beat fast at the thought, and then faster as she discovered how much it had moved her. She was alarmed. Of all forms of sin, that of loving one man while married to another had seemed to Viola the farthest removed from the sphere of possibility. She had always turned from the idea with disgust and horror.

And now!——

Now she could at least guess how such dreadful things

might occur, and what a weight of guilt and misery the wretched woman must carry at her heart, until the sin was expiated by some frightful suffering or cast out by the grace of Heaven.

Restlessly the lonely figure began to pace the room, up and down, up and down; the knife in her hand, its tiny gems gleaming in her face.

"Surely he will not find it here," she muttered half-aloud, going over to the cabinet and opening the drawer containing the letters and embroidery.

Taking the knife in both hands, she laid its point for a moment against her breast, pressing the handle a little. She let it rest there for a moment, as if questioning her ability to press it still farther should conscience permit. She was about to place it beside the other treasures, when a sound through the dusk made all the blood rush to her heart. She looked round in terror, but could see nothing. Her impulse was to rush out of the room, but she dared not move. Some terrible form, she felt sure, would meet her from every darkened corner, and as she passed the bed a figure would rise up out of the shadows and clutch her. She braced herself for a great effort. The whole width of the room had to be crossed; the door was at the farthest corner, the bed occupied the

middle of the wall opposite the window, and must be passed in order to reach the door. She set her teeth and moved forward rapidly. Thank Heaven! in another moment the ordeal would be over. But oh! if the door did not open quickly she thought she would go mad! Her eyes were fixed in fascinated horror on the bed as she prepared to make a rush. She had taken two steps forward, when suddenly she staggered back with a sick gasp, for out of the shadows of that bedstead —merciful Heaven! it was no fancy, but a ghastly fact! —a figure *did* rise up and a pair of arms *did* stretch out to clutch her! Viola uttered a shriek of terror. She saw something dark standing above her, a white face and two white hands approaching. She tottered back, struggling blindly, towards the window, ready to tear it open and fling herself out; then her power of movement failed her as in a nightmare and the room swam round. She felt the white hands on her neck, the dark arms close round her, and then something within her brain seemed to give way.

She knew no more.

When she awoke to consciousness the canopy of the carved bedstead was above her head, and she was lying on it weak and helpless.

She could see the demon faces of its carving by the light of a flickering candle which stood on the cabinet.

"Do you feel better now?"

Viola started and trembled. It was Philip's voice.

"Yes."

"Hold your tongue, then, and take this."

He gave her some brandy, then let her lie quiet for ten minutes. At the end of that time he came to the bedside. "You are easier to frighten than I thought," he said, moistening her forehead with eau-de-cologne. "You might have stopped to think for a moment before you fainted. You surely don't suppose that I didn't know of your frequent visits to this blue-beard chamber."

"You knew?" repeated Viola.

He smiled.

"Naturally. I thought you were coming too often, and began to suspect that something was up,—secret assignations, for all I knew. So I concluded it was time to reconnoitre. I reconnoitred from the convenient depths of my great-grandmother's four-poster. I didn't mean to give you such a fright, though. How you did shriek! But I confess I thought a little start would be salutary. It's uncanny to have a wife who spends hours in disused rooms, looking as if she were going to commit suicide from an upper window.

Not that I am afraid of her ending her days in that fashion. It pleases young minds of a certain order to dally with such ideas, but they seldom come to business. I don't expect to be a widower yet awhile, my dear."

Philip smiled urbanely as he bent over the figure of his wife, whose closed eyelids and exhausted attitude pleaded vainly for a moment's respite from his sneers. He thought she was shamming, or at least yielding unnecessarily to the effects of the shock.

"You would like to know, perhaps, how I became acquainted with your visits here. In a very simple way. Caleb Foster had seen you at the window, and without knowing he was betraying a secret, happened to mention the fact to me. As there is a staircase leading from this room to the terrace, I thought perhaps you were making ingenious use of it. Women with a Puritanical training are generally the most enterprising, when they get the chance."

Viola raised herself for a moment, but her strength failed her, and she sank back exhausted, the angry tears, to her intense disgust, welling up into her eyes. She hid away her face that Philip might not see them.

But he was not to be deceived.

"Oh! if you are going to resort to weeping, I have no

more to say. You had better let me carry you to your own room, and I can send Mrs. Barber or the maid to you. I dare say women know better the etiquette in such matters than I do."

"I can walk," said Viola, as he began to lift her from the bed.

"Try," he said.

She managed to totter only a few steps towards the door. Philip lifted her in his arms.

"You can leave me here, and send Mrs. Barber to me," she said. "Put me down."

"Nonsense; I shall take you to your room, as I said."

"I should much prefer to stay here. Philip, put me down," she repeated sharply, struggling to get free.

But he paid not the slightest attention. She was carried down the long empty corridors to her room.

As he laid her on her bed he bent down over her, his arms still round her, as if enjoying the sense of her helplessness and his power. He was smiling into her face. "Now," he said, "for the ministering angels and sal-volatile. I think this afternoon may be an instructive one for you, my dear. You observe that your doings are not secret from me. I have ways and means of finding out everything that I want to know. It would take a much subtler

person than you are to baffle me, and one who is rather more of an adept at telling lies. Let me advise you, for your good, to be open with me. It is your best policy. You have plenty of opportunities, if you would only use them to your own advantage. I am quite open to womanly wiles, my dear, if you did but know it." He gave her a little careless, insolent caress and walked off smiling.

"If you only knew how I *hate* you!" Viola exclaimed, with a sob of passion.

"My dear, I know it quite well. People generally hate their masters, if they are mad enough to oppose them. Again I say in all good-fellowship—try the *other* policy!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

SIBELLA.

Viola was seriously shaken by the shock which she had sustained on that afternoon in the west wing. She shrank from going about alone, especially after dark, and merely to look at the window of that dreadful room from outside would make her turn cold in full noontide.

"Dorothy, I wish you would introduce me to some of your villagers," she said once; "my life is so utterly useless that I think I am reaping the punishment of all cumberers of the ground. My own society is becoming unbearable to me."

Dorothy, though much surprised, gladly did as she was asked, but added that really there were not enough poor people at Upton to supply the needs of the already existing district visitors.

In spite of disappointment and difficulties Viola did make a determined effort to lay the energies of her wounded soul at the feet of fellow-sufferers.

She was coming back from a round of visits at Upton one afternoon, feeling sad and disheartened. It was late, and she felt a nervous dread of being alone at Upton Castle for two hours at dusk. She decided to take a longer way home, so as to make the time of solitude shorter. The house was becoming almost intolerable to her, and the strain of mind and nerve had begun to show only too clearly in her face. Viola bent her footsteps towards the sea. Arrived at the cliff's edge, she paused and peered over. A man was standing on the beach throwing stones into the water. If only it were Caleb! A good wholesome talk with that amiable encyclopædia would be like a tonic to the overwrought brain. It must be Caleb: who else would be on the shore at this time?

Viola determined to descend. The way was steep, but not difficult to one who knew the windings of the path. She lost sight of the figure on the beach and when she arrived there somewhat breathless, he was far away in the distance, looking very small and very dim. She broke into a run, but on coming closer she began to feel doubtful whether it were Caleb after all. Nevertheless something impelled her to go on. The sea ran hungrily upon the beach, dragging the stones back and forward with each

pulse-beat. Viola continued her reasonless pursuit. The power that drew her on seemed irresistible.

Suddenly the man, who had been walking at a brisk pace, came to a standstill, and looked up towards a pathway that led from the beach to a little wind-shorn wood nestling in a hollow of the downs. From the heart of the wood a tiny column of blue smoke rose out of shelter, to be buffeted by a boisterous sea-breeze and driven inland.

Viola paused with beating heart, still instinctively keeping out of sight. A strange idea had taken possession of her that this man was—Harry Lancaster!

She started violently, and shrank back into the fissure where she had concealed herself, for her suspicion was confirmed. Her heart gave an excited bound and then seemed to stand still altogether. What had brought him thus suddenly over from Ireland? She watched his movements breathlessly. After looking up at the pathway to the little wood for some seconds, Harry turned away and walked to the verge of the sea. Viola could hear the great stones crunching under his footsteps as he plunged across them. He stood and watched the waves rolling up, and the hissing back-rush of the water over the small pebbles.

Occasionally he would turn and take another expectant look at the pathway, but ten minutes passed and nobody

appeared. For whom was he waiting? The tide had just turned, and every tenth wave brought the line of wetted pebbles farther towards the cliff, causing Harry to step back gradually in the same direction. He came at last to within a dozen yards of Viola's hiding-place. Yes; there was no mistaking that upright soldier-like figure, that peculiar pose of the head. There was a very sombre expression on his face; the lips were set and hard, as if their owner suffered pain.

The temptation to reveal her presence was very strong, but Viola, resisting it, held her breath lest she should betray herself. Interest, yearning for sympathy, dramatic curiosity, all battled with the nervous horror of being discovered. Finally conscience, as usual, turned the scale.

Then came a scorching thought!

Fir Dell lay among the trees just up here: could Harry be waiting for Mrs. Lincoln? It seemed impossible—Mrs. Lincoln, a married woman, and not a good one. No! Harry was not that kind of man. His character was too deep for such mockery of true love.

Then came a chilling consciousness: what was unforgivable in a woman, a man might do without ceasing to respect himself or to command respect from others. Whatever he might do or feel, however, Viola was sure that

she ought to avoid him. Since the line where sin begins and innocence ends did not coincide in the two cases, her *rôle*, in the event of a meeting, might prove beyond her powers. It would be like a game wherein one player was bound by the rules and the other was not.

Again Harry turned to look at the pathway from the wood, and this time he hurried forward, raising his hat with a relieved smile.

"I feared you were not coming," he said.

"I very nearly did not come," returned a voice singularly soft and rich,—a woman's voice, implying many things, as voices do.

Viola drew in her breath, too excited and bewildered to realise that she had now assumed the part of eavesdropper.

"Max Hoffmann and his followers have just left me," the voice continued, "or I should have been here before. Not been waiting long, I hope." She gave him another hearty shake of the hand. "How nice it is to meet again after all this time! I see you have a great deal to tell me, if you choose." She looked anxiously and affectionately in his face.

"You are right," he said. "You always know, Sibella."

By this time the two figures had moved a little, and were walking forward side by side along the shore.

Viola saw a graceful figure, clad from head to foot in rich dark red. Against the grey of the sea and sky and the white cliffs, that touch of warm colour was most cheering. Instinctively Viola glanced at her own ladylike gown of nondescript tint, and was dimly conscious that the difference of attire indicated some radical difference of temperament.

Firm and fearless was this woman's gait, and the same spirit showed in the upright pose of the head. It was scarcely possible in the dusk to discern the features. The hair and eyes were dark, and this, with the red cloak and little cloth cap, gave the wearer a rather gipsy-like appearance.

During the few seconds in which all this had passed, Viola stood motionless in her hiding-place. She was scarcely capable of movement, for there was a strong paralysing pain at her heart. It was not figurative or poetical; it was an actual physical pain, as if the stream of life being blocked up, were struggling in vain for outlet.

"Harry, you don't look well; what is troubling you?"

"More things than one; but I want to hear about you. Tell me everything. You have haunted my thoughts as usual, Sibella. I don't like these long partings."

"Nor I," she said; "but life is full of partings—perhaps in preparation for the last and the longest one of all. What was that?"

She paused suddenly.

"Did you not hear a sound of footsteps over the stones?"

Harry shook his head.

"Surely! Ah, yes! I see a figure running by the foot of the cliff there, looking like a moving shadow against the white."

Harry also could see something that might be a figure.

"We must have been overheard," he said.

"The good people of Upton take a more than Christian interest in their neighbours," observed Sibella, with a laugh.

"Confound them!" Harry exclaimed. "Well, I hope our eavesdropper was interested."

"*I* hope that she may catch cold," said Sibella.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONSPIRACY.

As the afternoon went on, the wind began to rise, and the sea became perturbed as if with premonitions of storm.

Sibella shivered.

"It is going to be a wild night," she said. "Do you hear that ominous muttering in the sound of the sea; not loud, but deep and malignant? The wind is very keen and angry," she continued, as Harry did not answer; "let us go home. I should like to show you my little house in the wood; it is so pretty and cosy."

They walked on quickly together.

"Harry, I have often wished that your sister would come and see me, but of course she won't."

"I fear not," said Harry, with a shake of the head. "'A mad world, Horatio!' Adrienne," he continued, "is a woman to go through fire and water at the call of duty. She has a theory ready made to fit anything that happens, so that she and Fate stand obstinately confronted; they

devour each other, tails and all, while Adrienne, gradually diminishing, still cries out, 'Uncomfortable, but for the best!'"

Sibella smiled.

"What hope have I of indulgence from such a woman?"

"Or what hope has she," said Harry, "of evading her own theories? She belongs to that vast band who suffer from what I call the disease of *words;* who are eaten up by words, as some wretched animal is devoured by parasites. Adrienne pronounces to herself (for instance) the word 'duty,' or 'right,' and lets it fasten upon her soul and feed there as a leech."

"Is it curable?" asked Sibella.

"Not when it is far gone."

"Your sister?"

"Half her substance is already devoured. Speak to her out of the fulness of the heart, and she balks you with a *word.* Try to vault over it, and you leave her far behind on the other side; she sits upon the partition and shakes her head, and perhaps sighs. And that ends everything."

Sibella laughed a little sadly.

"And the word that partitions us—she and I, is—'respectability.' And I used to be *so* respectable! There was really something extra superfine about my respect-

ability, if she only knew it; it was a respectability as of the Medes and Persians!"

"Foreign virtue," said Harry, "is unsatisfactory to the truly British mind."

"Say instinct," she suggested. "'British mind' is a phrase that seems to me too enterprising."

"I think you are pretty well," he observed; "you don't run amuck in this way unless you have some surplus energy. You are only quixotic when in good health."

"I haven't been laughed at since I saw you last, except behind my back. It is quite refreshing! No, I am not well, however, in spite of my energy—and I have been very ill indeed—in the summer."

"And you never told me!" Harry exclaimed, reproachfully. "It was cruel to keep me in ignorance."

"Well, well, perhaps I won't next time. No, I would rather not talk about it just now; it's a miserable subject. I thought I was going to die, quite alone, without a word of farewell to any one, and"——

"*Sibella!*"

"Don't look so horrified. It is over. Peace be to the past. Come back and see my home; why do I keep you shivering here? And we can talk out our arrears by my study-fire. Such a dear little room, Harry, looking

on to the sea, with a group of sighing pine-trees for a foreground."

She led the way up the path by which she had descended to the beach, and the talk drifted on till they reached the house.

Sibella led the way into a pleasant little room, where tea and toast and a friendly kettle awaited their coming. Books and work lay about, and there were sundry antique vases and glass bottles of strange shape.

"I see you still have your prehistoric things in bronze," said Harry, standing near the fireplace while Sibella made the tea.

"What should I be without my *mementi mori?* I think of the fellow-men who fashioned these images, and I know that all is vanity."

"Tea is not vanity," said Harry; "tea is an eternal verity; I am sure Carlyle would admit that."

"In one of his paroxysms of silence," added Sibella fantastically. "Sugar?" she inquired.

"You have forgotten!"

"Sugar it must be, and many lumps," she said. "He that takes no sugar, secure in the consciousness of innocence, says so boldly at once."

Sibella laughed and pushed a low chair before the fire.

"Now are the conditions of masculine amiability fulfilled? Stay! *buttered toast*—some men become fascinating after buttered toast—though it is more usually indicated in the case of maiden ladies, not without cats."

"Oh, please don't do that!" Harry exclaimed, bending down to take the slice of bread which she was toasting. "You'll be roasted alive. I want no buttered toast."

"But I want you to be amiable—go away, let me alone; I am happier than I have been for many a long day. It is the old instinct springing up again, of the woman to wait upon the man. That happens—a reversion to some hereditary instinct—to all of us. Hence our inconsistencies which people throw in our teeth. Ah! the bread begins to steam and to emit sweet odours. This, let me remark suggestively, is the stage at which the flush of dawning amiability begins to appear — in the average patient." She looked up and smiled.

Sibella's was one of those faces which indicate the high-water-mark of human development. Thus far has man gone upon the path of progress; thus far is he removed from the animal. Still it was not the face of a saint; for that, the smile was too brilliant and sometimes too mocking.

"Why do you talk of everything except yourself, Sibella?

I want to hear how you like Upton, what you are doing, whether you know any one here, whether"——

"I like Upton extremely," she said; "the neighbourhood is charming, and the sea—ah! that goes to my heart. But it is very tragic; there is something tragic in the air of this place; I never felt anything before to equal it. It quite depresses me sometimes."

"You are as impressionable as ever, I see," said Harry. He seemed about to say more, but hesitated.

"Do you ever see Philip Dendraith now?" he asked at length.

"Oh yes; he comes pretty often."

"I want to interest you about his wife," said Harry. "I told you how I tried to save her from the marriage, and how I failed. She knows nothing of the world; she is intensely sensitive; judge for yourself whether she is happy."

Sibella had risen and walked to the window. "It seems almost as if this deadly oppression in the air of this place had not been without meaning. I wonder if the trouble of this girl could in any way have communicated itself to me."

"I think it is more than probable," Harry returned. "Sibella, I have roused your sympathy, but I want more."

"My help? What can I do?"

"I don't know, but I want you to watch your opportunity. What you mean to do you *can* do."

She gave a dissenting gesture.

"How one must pay for one's victories!"

"Yes, one must pay for being stronger than our neighbours," said Harry.

She gave a long sigh.

"One beats up against wind and tide, not for a moment daring to relax, lest the current sweep one back upon the hard-worn way. At last, after a hard fight, a little temporary shelter offers itself for a moment's breathing-space. Do you fondly imagine that the luxury will be allowed? Pray undeceive yourself. Your friends crowd round congratulating, 'How well you are placed! What a charming and convenient spot! Fate has been kind indeed—the shade, how grateful! the sun, how warm!—truly Fortune smiles upon you. What you win with your heart's blood is counted to the gods!"

"If you are tired out, I have no more to say," Harry rejoined, rising and going to the fire.

"Go on," she said; "I speak one way and act another. You know me."

"I know that when people have had to fight and

to suffer, they do one of two things: either they develop the instinct to push others back as they have been pushed back themselves, or they become eager to rescue and to warn. I thought that you would belong to the second class."

"You always think over-highly of me, and at one time I was nearer to deserving it than I am now. I fear I have lost hope. The misery of people overwhelms me, sickens me. How can one rescue individuals who expiate the sins against Reason of the forefathers of the race? It is all written in the Book of Doom."

"That is fatalism," said Harry.

Sibella paused, and her eyes wandered out to the mournful fir-trees, themselves like Fates standing dominant over the fast fading scene.

"A woman brought up in such a manner as to make her at once intensely sensitive and intensely conscientious is a ready-made martyr; nothing can save her. She is predestined."

Harry bent down and stirred the fire with vicious vehemence.

"I think women like Mrs. Sedley ought to be" —— he smashed a large piece of coal into splinters by way of finish to the sentence.

"You ask me to help this girl," Sibella continued. "Why not suggest that I should forbid to-morrow's dawn? The whole machinery of doom is in motion; can I stop it?"

Harry felt himself grow cold.

"She is a woman; she is human," he said.

"She is the child of her generation," returned Sibella. "Woman is the scapegoat of society. Upon her head are piled all the iniquities and the transgressions and the sins of the children of Israel, for an atonement; and then 'by the hand of a fit man'—as the Scriptures have it—she is driven forth into the wilderness."

"We must save her!" cried Harry hoarsely.

"'But the goat on which the lot for Azazel fell, shall be presented alive before Jehovah, to make atonement with him, to let him go to Azazel in the wilderness,'" quoted Sibella slowly.

"But if she should rise in revolt; if she should refuse any longer to be made into a scapegoat?" cried Harry excitedly.

"She cannot revolt; she must accept the ceremony as sacred. She is the child of her fathers, and a spell is laid upon her. Conscience is the most tenacious of human attributes, provided it has its root in prejudice.

You can deliver a prisoner who will run when the gates are open, but what can you do with one who draws the bolts and turns the locks against his would-be saviour?"

"If you will not help her, she has no helper upon this earth!" Harry exclaimed.

"I thought your sister was her friend."

"My sister!" he cried impatiently; "she only cheers on the victim; feeds her on a soft warm spongy sort of doctrine, perfectly ruinous to one of her temperament."

"Are you unable to help her yourself,—since you believe in the possibility of rescue?"

Harry passed his hands through his hair, with a gesture of desperation.

"Her husband hates me and suspects me. I could not go to his house. Before their marriage I was his rival—his determined and obstinate rival. I thought on that day of the wedding, when I saw her standing there by his side, as if I must either break in between them and tear her away, or go mad on the spot. I did neither, of course. I am capable of killing that man if I saw him ill-treat her." He bent his head, buried in his hands, upon the table. "I would die for her, I would commit a crime for her;—what do I care?" he went on excitedly. "Her eyes haunt me day and night; I am almost desperate,—if only she would

listen to me—if only she would leave him and come with me! We *could* do it if only she *would!*"

Sibella looked at him with pity in her eyes.

"I know what you are thinking, though you don't say it," he cried—"that still her fate would pursue her, making happiness impossible because of the eternal visitations of remorse. Yes; and I know it is damnably true. The curse is upon us to the end!"

Sibella laid her hand tenderly on his arm, but made no immediate reply.

A strong gust of wind that went sobbing round the house seemed like the wild and grimly sincere answer of the elements.

She had said that she believed in Fate, and her belief was strengthened as she stood mournfully by the side of the man who had been to her for the best years of her life her devoted and unswerving friend. What could she do to unravel the Gordian-knot, tied and drawn tight by the force of generations and the weight of centuries?

Perhaps the melancholy in the sound of wind and wave, the dark loneliness of the swaying pine-trees, uttered gloomy prophecies and forbade the rising of the star of hope.

Her knowledge of the force of emotion in this man made her tremble the more.

"To have the capacity for extreme suffering in this best of all possible worlds," she said bitterly to herself, "is to attract it." She paused, deeply considering. Then she touched him on the shoulder quietly—

"Harry, I will do what I can."

He stretched out his hand and pressed hers without speaking.

The silence continued for some minutes, the wind cannonading outside, and tearing and snarling in savage temper at every victim branch exposed, by ill-luck, to its fury. Sibella gave an excited shiver. From familiar association, some favourite lines ran in fragmentary snatches athwart her hastening thoughts :—

> "Pain, ah! eternal pain!
> I hear Æolian harpings wail and die
> Down forest glades, and through the hearts of men.
> Pain, pain! eternal pain!"

She rose and walked restlessly to the window, and then back to the fire.

"Why are you not a man of faint desires and half-developed nerves? Why are you not quietly wise with the wisdom of the world, taking things as you find them?"

"I suppose our nature is our fate, and can't be evaded," said Harry.

"Then pray for a new nature," cried Sibella. "The gods are cheats! What is the use of giving us a commanding watchword, an 'open sesame' at which all doors fly back, if the eternal hunger is to be awakened by the splendour of our visions? Every human possibility they fling recklessly at our feet—yes, but just to show us that there is a green land and fair cities beyond the desert which we can never cross!"

There was a loud ring at the bell: Harry sprang up. "A visitor on such a night! I will go."

"No," said Sibella hastily; "you may get indirect help or information; one must not neglect such chances. Stay and keep your ears open."

The door was thrown back and the maid announced, "Mr. Dendraith."

One glance passed between Sibella and Harry, and then she went quickly forward.

"How good of you to come on this wild evening, Mr. Dendraith! You are indeed a chevalier *sans peur*"——

"Don't stop abruptly, Mrs. Lincoln!" exclaimed Philip.

"Oh, no man wants to be *sans reproche;* it is not 'good

form.' Do sit down and warm yourself. You know Mr. Lancaster, of course; he too has come against wind and tide to break my solitude."

"What! Lancaster! Didn't recognise you for the moment—a thousand pardons. When did you return to these delirious parts? I don't wonder you act the moth; our local lights are dangerously brilliant."

"Of course Mr. Lancaster has filial duties to perform at Upton," said Sibella.

"True," said Philip. "I hope you have found your mother and sister well."

"Pretty well," said Harry laconically.

"Are you making a long stay?"

"That is undecided."

"I fear," said Philip, "that you are rather a rolling stone—no stability. There is nothing that gives more weight to the character than a permanent address."

"Weight, but not charm," put in Sibella; "for that one does not need the more solid virtues. Whoever loved a man for his punctuality?"

She had a bright flush on her cheeks, and Harry saw that she was talking at random to keep the conversation going.

"I believe," she continued, "that Lord Chesterfield

completely estranged the affections of his son, and that Madame de Sevigné made an enemy for life of her daughter, simply and solely through the alienating effects of good advice."

"I must be going," said Harry abruptly. He would not be persuaded to wait for the rain to cease.

Sibella went with him to the front-door.

"Come and see me to-morrow if you can. I want to talk this matter out with you. Keep a firm hold over yourself with"—— she threw back her head towards the study. "Don't let him guess that you are otherwise than indifferent. I can see he enjoys your suffering; this is an enemy who must be warily fought—he is keen and strong. Good-night and good-speed."

She hastened back to her guest.

"At last!" cried Philip.

"At last?" she repeated.

"At last I have you to myself."

"As far as talking was concerned, I think you had that privilege from the beginning."

Philip smiled.

"Our friend was not so eloquent as usual; he didn't quite appreciate my intrusion, I fancy."

"Do draw your chair near the fire," said Sibella.

She had established herself comfortably, with her feet on the fender, looking the picture of idleness, and now and then a little secret smile flitted across her face as she listened to her companion's compliments. Philip drew his own chair closer to the fire, as he was bidden, keeping a pair of searching and admiring eyes fixed upon Sibella's face.

He studied her intently. He wished to find out whether he had made any kind of serious impression upon her; whether he sufficiently interested her to remain in her thoughts after he had left; whether she noticed the lapse of time between his visits. This was always the unsolved question in his mind. To-night his excitement began to rise.

"I wonder sometimes," Philip said, drawing his chair a little closer—"I wonder what Upton would be like if you were to leave it."

Sibella's head bent lower for a moment, and Philip saw a smile spreading over her face.

"I really don't think it would be endurable," he added in a low voice.

"The value of property would go down," she remarked.

"Oh! but I mean seriously."

"So do I, very seriously."

"Mrs. Lincoln, you know well how dependent I am upon you for"——

"Amusement," she said. "Yes, I know it well; I study up old *Punches* so that you may not come to me in vain."

"I come to you for something more than this"——

He watched her face keenly for something that might encourage him to go on, but the motionless attitude, lowered eyes, and the slight smiles, like wandering fires, playing round the lips told him nothing. He was too wary to venture further. He knew that he had expressed his meaning, but not so definitely that she could openly resent it, if her mind lay towards resentment.

There was a long pause.

"The elements are conspiring in my favour," said Philip, when presently a heavy gust shook the window. "My visit is long beyond all hope of indulgence, but my excuse is the storm. Were it *between* instead of around us, I should treat it with little respect."

"You seem to confound me and the storm in your imagination," said Sibella, looking up for a minute.

"Ah! how can you say that? Have I not waited long enough? Have I not obeyed your merest hint and wish? Have I not again and again been silent when I longed to speak?"

She gave a little shudder.

"Well, we will not pursue this subject," she said; "there are things which appear to us under aspects so different that we have no common language in which to discuss them. In so far as you mean and feel disrespect, I bitterly resent every word you have uttered. Don't protest. You are a man of the world, and think of these things as men of the world think of them. That is enough for me. You don't understand? No, and you can't."

Philip frowned.

"I must have further explanation; it is my right."

She shook her head. He came towards her eagerly. The excitement of the experiment was near to carrying him away, cool-headed as he was.

She broke into a laugh. She too had been trying an experiment, and the result entertained her.

Philip looked angry. He felt that he had made a miscalculation; the affair had drifted on to a wrong footing—drifted? Had it not been skilfully guided by Sibella, whose will quietly and subtly opposed his, deliberately blunting the point of the episode to which he had been leading up? He was puzzled and amazed.

"It's that confounded fool, Lancaster!"

He felt too angry to stay longer, especially as Sibella was looking exasperatingly amiable.

"I fear I have outstayed my welcome," he said, taking her hand; "perhaps some other day, when you have not had a more attractive visitor, you may treat my poor feelings with less disdain."

She laughed a little, and said politely that she never treated anybody's feelings with disdain, least of all Mr. Dendraith's.

"Oh, that's mere arabesque," cried Philip; "I would really prefer downright impoliteness."

She gave a little gesture of horror.

"I should expect to be struck dead on the spot by a vengeful thunderbolt, if to you I could be guilty of impoliteness!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"*THE HUMAN COMEDY.*"

The elements had stormed themselves tired; with the dawn came a slowly growing peace, and the sun rose over a sea still perturbed, but with the movements of a past agitation, no longer with the riot of present passion.

All the changes of the night Viola could have described, detail by detail. She lay in the great carved bed, listening to the roar of wind and wave, following with wide-awake intentness every rise and fall in their voices, every shift from boom to shriek, from blasphemy to lamentation, as, with a baffled drop, the sea-gusts swerved from the castle wall and went searching and blustering among the trembling battlements. As the storm grew less violent, the wind seemed to be playing hide-and-seek through the windows, through *that* window where Philip had sat and fallen so many years ago.

Always on these wild nights the memory returned to haunt her, and to remind her of the wickedness that lay

at the bottom of her heart, ready at any time to rise in volcanic rebellion against principle, against conscience, against all the long faithful teachings of her childhood. She had formed a strange habit of torturing herself with this memory, as if she felt it a talisman against sin. To-night the talisman had been mercilessly used, for she was frightened at the tumult that had been roused in her by that scene on the beach. What business had she to care whom Harry went to meet on the shore, or whom he loved?

But the pain throbbed on none the less, gnawing, corroding ruthlessly. It seemed as if by morning her very heart must be eaten away, and then, thank Heaven! there would be nothing more to suffer!

In the bewilderment of these stormy night-thoughts, she half-believed that the dawn would really find her calm and insensible. When the first signs of it crept about the room she rose and looked out, leaving Philip safely asleep. The sea was bleak and wan.

> "By the lone shore
> Mournfully beat the waves."

It was Sunday morning, promising well for a day of rest.

Kneeling by the half-open window, her dark hair flowing

about her with an abandonment that she never permitted to her own heart, Viola leant her head upon her hands and prayed. As her eyes fixed themselves upon the point in the grey sky where the flush of dawn had just appeared, there rose an unconscious worship in her soul for that coming sun, at whose glance the leaden waters awoke rejoicing, crying aloud at the glory of their resurrection.

The scene was one of deep religious significance to Viola; her soul wrestled in prayer, soared in adoration to the God of Nature, whose works were so great and fraught with terror, yet so marvellously beautiful.

Her own griefs appeared not less bitter but more bearable, since they were imposed by the hand of the All-powerful, who had promised to lead His obedient children safely through the darkest places, would they only have faith in Him. It was but for a little while, and then rest. Viola had been so often tempted to cry out in her misery, "Why THIS trial of all others?" but to-day she thought she understood that it had been inflicted just *because* it alone seemed quite intolerable to her, because by this means alone could her soul be purified in the agonising passage through fiery gulfs of humiliation. The shame of conscious sin was not spared her; she was doomed to look

into her own soul and see there—struggle as she might—a guilty love for one who was not her husband, a man who had done his utmost to lead her away from the path of obedience, and who—God forgive him!—had made her waver in secret with the awful force of the temptation.

Perhaps the tempest that had raged within her all through the night had left her exhausted in mind and body, and therefore the more ready to be touched by the optimistic influences of sunrise over a calming sea.

It seemed to her as a distinct message; the gentle yet spirited little waves, foam-crowned and tinged with the splendour of the morning, brought tidings of peace as they rolled in, each with a little sigh, upon the shore.

When at last Viola returned from the window prepared to take up the burdens of the day, there was a look in her face such as is seen sometimes in the faces of the dying; very calm, beautiful, and unearthly.

Philip was in one of his most biting moods this morning; every incident was the signal for a sneer, or for some remark that to Viola was worse than any sneer. Philip's coarseness—though he knew how to conceal it when convenient—had attained a high stage of development.

This morning, after various remarks which Viola felt on their way, and dreaded as if they were so many blows, Philip fell to talking about Harry Lancaster. He alluded to his former conduct in no measured terms, and informed his wife that he had now turned up again, and was philandering at the heels of Mrs. Lincoln, the improper but agreeable young person who had become tenant of Fir Dell. It was well he had thus transferred his attentions, as Philip had no notion of having the fellow loafing about *this* place on any pretext.

"We shall probably be meeting him now and then," he said, "and I wish you to let him see clearly that my wife is a different person from Richard Sedley's daughter."

"I hope that I know what is fitting for your wife," said Viola, who was more ready than ever in her present humour to allow her individuality, as a woman, to be swallowed up in her wifehood and daughterhood.

When she went upstairs to dress for church, the thought that Harry might be there, filled her with unrest. Would he see her? Would he speak to her, and if so, in what manner? Would it be distantly and formally, or with the old ring in his voice that meant so much—— ?

When Philip and his wife entered the church, the school-

children and labourers were in their places, as well as a few of the farmers and their families.

The brilliant morning light fell in slanting beams across the building, and through the Norman windows unattentive worshippers might watch the trees waving in the wind or white clouds sailing across the sky.

The pew belonging to Upton Court was in the chancel, and thither with echoing footsteps marched Sir Philip, following in the humble wake of old Lady Dendraith, in purple silk, and bonnet tilted to one side in a rollicking fashion, of which the innocent wearer was quite unconscious.

To Viola's surprise, Geoffrey—now returned from his year at Sandhurst — appeared and came to his sister's pew.

"Have you walked?" she whispered.

"Across country! dead beat—couldn't stand 'Sunday at home'—the mother's laying it on hotter than ever—the governor's simply intolerable. Look at my boots!"

They betrayed recent contact with Mother-Earth.

"Came through all that to get away—wouldn't have let me go if I hadn't said I was coming to church."

"I'm glad you have come," said Viola.

Geoffrey kept up a running commentary on the people as they came in.

"Caleb Foster! What does *he* come to church for?"

"For the same reason as every one here present," said Philip, "to propitiate Mrs. Grundy."

"*I* come to propitiate my mother," said Geoffrey in a stage whisper.

"Mrs. Grundy masquerading," said Philip; "a man never pays her so much attention as when she bespeaks it through his mother, or his sister, or his cousin, or his aunt!"

"Mr. and Mrs. Pellett! Hurrah!" exclaimed the excitable youth, hoarse from speaking *sotto voce.*

Mrs. Pellett wore a bonnet which alone might have been a passport into heaven, if proved indifference to the pomps and vanities will suffice for that purpose. But clearly Mrs. Pellett had no notion of trusting solely to her head-gear for her heavenly prospects; her expression, as she walked up the aisle, could not have been surpassed, to say nothing of her books of devotion, whose size was prodigious.

Her white-headed husband slowly followed. Among his musty folios, the old scholar was happy and at home, but out in the light of day, among a host of staring fellow-creatures, he felt bewildered. The smallest boy in the school might have bullied Mr. Pellett beyond the walls of

his study. His wife's signs to him to get out the books confused him, and made him shift his hat from one place to another, knock down the umbrellas, and finally propel the entire body of volumes on to his wife's person when she was kneeling for a preliminary prayer.

There were few hearts in that church which did not leap for joy at the sight! Dorothy Evans was visibly enraptured.

The Clevedon party arrived next with several visitors, among them Arabella; and finally Mrs. Dixie appeared, followed by Adrienne—Viola held her breath—and—*not* Harry!

Why did he stay away? Had he gone to Mrs. Lincoln's? Was *she* keeping him from church?

The whole place seemed to have grown suddenly dark and bleak. How cold the pillars looked! how hard and rough the stonework! how repellantly uninteresting the faces! how horribly ugly Mrs. Pellett's Sunday bonnet!

Mrs. Dixie and Adrienne caught Viola's eye, and Adrienne smiled across at her.

Then the congregation rose and the service began.

Viola heard the familiar words reverberating through the church, and heaved a sigh of something between relief and desperation. She looked round at the bent heads of

the labourers, dull, patient creatures bowing under the yoke of toil all through the week, and trooping on Sunday to praise the God who so ordered their soul-destroying lives. Yet it was with a sense of envy that Viola studied the vacant, bucolic faces.

She tried to follow the service as usual, but her thoughts were too quick and her heart too disturbed. She found herself absently turning over the leaves of a great Bible. The first words that attracted her attention were: "So I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun; and behold the tears of such as are oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of the oppressors there was power, but they had no comforter."

Always the tiny white clouds flitted merrily across the little stage formed by the arch of the window opposite, and through it danced the light of the spring morning.

"I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto thee, O Lord, will I sing."

The people, in a slow, toiling manner, beat out the words of the psalm.

Viola felt heart-sick and bewildered.

Things spoke with many voices; there was a confusion of tongues; life was hedged round with mysteries black as

midnight; yet out of every gulf came some vivid lightning-flash for a quivering moment, through the rolling vapours of the darkness.

"The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed," sang the industrious people.

Geoffrey, who was not musical, wandered about tentatively among the lower notes, but came out enjoyingly with the verses: "I am like a pelican in the wilderness; I am like an owl in the desert."

"I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house-top."

The picture of the forlorn sparrow seemed to attract him irresistibly. What a medley it all was, of the comic, the pathetic, the dull, the commonplace, and the tragic; a world in miniature!

By this time Lady Dendraith's bonnet had slipped so hopelessly out of position that Sir Philip rashly interfered, causing her to lose her bearings altogether, and reach a state of confusion in which he was powerless to help. There seemed to be no method in the madness of that bonnet, no apparent claim in any part of it to be more to the front or to the back than any other part—a fatal difficulty in a head-gear with whose topography one is not familiar. Lady Dendraith spoke piteously of an aigrette as a

landmark, but Sir Philip washed his hands of it inexorably. The bonnet kept the schoolboys and Geoffrey happy for the rest of the service, and gave the old lady a severe qualm of dismay when she went home and consulted the mirror. She looked like an elderly Bacchante, just returned from a revel! Meanwhile she settled herself in a dark corner and went decently to sleep.

The text of the sermon was from the Book of Job (Lady Dendraith gave a peaceful sigh when it was given out). The weary, passionate words thrilled through the shadows of the church, and every heart capable of suffering stirred responsively. Job, cursing the day of his birth, longs to be where "the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."

"Wherefore is light given unto him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?"

Mr. Evans undertook to show that Job's sentiments were reprehensible; that in no possible circumstances is the creature of God justified in desiring to evade the trials that He has appointed.

"Oh! my brethren, we must bow to the will of Heaven

without repining; we must accept, we must even welcome, the trials that come to us, though we may be stricken with disease, and lonely and deserted as Job was. Resignation is the lesson at once of life and of religion. It may be, my brethren, that we fancy ourselves better able to understand what is good for us than our Heavenly Father, who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb."

(A phenomenally thoughtful shepherd in the congregation here felt the fatal opposition between religion and science, boisterous weather having set in immediately after shearing on more occasions than one that he could mention.)

"We know that more will not be given to us than we can bear," pursued Mr. Evans, and his robust and prosperous appearance seemed to justify the opinion, though a glance at his worn-looking wife might have bid him pause before making so quite sure of his doctrine.

Mr. Evans preached for about twenty minutes, and in that time he had succeeded in taking all the passion and force out of the character of his hero, and in reducing to commonplace the utterances that have come ringing down to us through so many ages, fresh and hot from the soul of one who cried aloud in anguish of body and anguish of soul.

As soon as the sermon was over and the organ began to fill the church with triumphant strains, the old clerk set open the doors, disclosing a view of the sunlit churchyard.

As the worm-eaten side-door was flung back, Viola caught sight of two figures among the graves:—those of Harry Lancaster and Mrs. Lincoln. Mrs. Lincoln had on a blue cloak and a hat of the same colour, in which was twined a wreath of real ivy. She was sitting on the top of a flat tomb, and Harry stood beside her, looking down. Viola thought she had never seen so attractive a face.

How could a bad woman look like that? And there was something in the expression that filled Viola with an astonished belief that, however she might have sinned, Mrs. Lincoln was a person to be implicitly trusted.

As the notes of the organ poured through the open doors Sibella rose, and she and Harry strolled away together, as if to avoid encountering the people when they came out.

The church-door was the scene of many greetings. Every one said, "What a lovely morning!" unless he remarked, "What a gale there was last night!"

Dorothy and Mrs. Pellett waylaid Viola.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Dendraith. I *hope* you are feeling better than you look."

"Oh, much!" Geoffrey answered for her.

"Your dear mother is feeling very anxious about you, my dear."

"Thanks to your kind interest in my sister," said the irrepressible one, "my mother has scarcely had a wink of sleep for three weeks."

The rector came forward to shake hands all round.

"Mr. Evans, I must congratulate you on your sermon," cried Mrs. Pellett. "It was excellent—so *sound*."

"Well, I trust that it was, perhaps, *sound*," returned the rector. "I have always endeavoured to—in short, be sound. There is so much to be deplored in these materialistic days as—as regards—in fact *soundness*."

"Ah, so you may say, Mr. Evans!" exclaimed the lady sadly; "so you may say."

Mr. Evans shook hands with Mrs. Dixie.

"Charming morning, Mrs. Dixie. And what a gale we had last night! By the way, I have to congratulate you on the unexpected return of your son."

"Yes; we are indeed glad to have the dear fellow back again."

Viola was greeted effusively by Arabella. How long it was since they had met! She really must try and get over to see Mrs. Dendraith, but so much always went on at

Clevedon. There was to be a large gathering there on the 12th—everybody invited. And so that dear Mr. Lancaster of whom Augusta was so fond had come back. Had Mrs. Dendraith heard of it?

Mrs. Courtenay's sharp little brown eyes, fixed upon Viola's face, were like two gimlets.

Yes, Mrs. Dendraith had heard of it from her husband.

"You have not seen him yet, I suppose."

The moment was a crucial one for Viola, to whom an untruth seemed almost impossible. Perhaps Arabella saw that she was perturbed, and scenting a mystery, perhaps an improper mystery (Oh, joy of the proper!), she pinned her dear Mrs. Dendraith unwarrantably to the point.

"You have seen Mr. Lancaster, perhaps. I hope he is looking well."

"I hear that he is," said Viola.

"Oh, then you have *not* seen him?"

This was cruel.

"Yes, I have seen him," said Viola at last, in desperation, not perceiving any loophole of escape. But nothing would induce her to continue the conversation. She plunged after her husband and brother in the hope of persuading them to leave, but when she appealed to Geoffrey, Arabella bore down upon Philip.

"Charmed to meet your wife again, Mrs. Dendraith," said Arabella, with one of her most irresistible wriggles. "I am always accusing Fate for her unkindness in putting fourteen miles between our houses."

"Nobody could regret that more than I do," returned Philip.

"Oh! Mr. Dendraith, you are as bad as ever!"

"I fear that in your society I shall become considerably worse," he replied.

"Dear, dear; what will your wife say if I let you go on like this? Is she jealous? I really hope not, for she would have much to suffer. *You* don't know what it is to be jealous, I am sure. How nice that must be!"

"It is," said Philip.

"You are a spoilt child of nature, Mr. Dendraith; all the gilt without the gingerbread—no, I don't mean that quite, but all the plums without the cake—no, that won't do either; but you know how excellent are my intentions. Now, haven't you some Upton news to tell me?—somebody has surely died or got married since I left. I hear that charming creature, Mr. Lancaster, has returned; quite the pet of the village, isn't he?"

"Oh, quite," said Philip.

"Your wife tells me he is looking so well."

Philip gave a slight movement of the eyebrows.

"Nobody heard of his arrival till last night," he observed.

"Really! And yet I thought she told me that she had met him—a mistake, no doubt, on my part."

"If you never make a mistake of greater importance, Mrs. Courtenay, you have my sincere congratulations."

"Now, Arabella," interposed Lady Clevedon, "you have chattered long enough. Philip, I want you and Viola to dine with us on the 12th. Will you?"

"Charmed," said Philip; "I have nothing on the 12th."

"We have some people coming—a good many of the neighbours—and there are one or two staying in the house who can sing and play, so we shall have some music. If you can perform, bring your instrument."

"The big drum," said Philip; "it shall accompany me."

Geoffrey returned with his sister and her husband for luncheon. On the homeward way they fell to discussing Harry Lancaster's sudden return.

"It must be just over two years since you saw him, Viola," said her husband.

She did not answer.

"Or is it longer? No, the last time was at our marriage."

"Oh, if you are going in for this style of discussion—*à la* maiden aunt"—cried Geoffrey, "I shall put cotton-wool in my ears. Let us not recall the past."

"It has been said that no man would willingly react his part in it," observed Philip.

"Certainly no *woman* would!" Viola exclaimed.

"Woman is an adorable and ill-treated being," said Philip; "quite immaculate, as ill-treated creatures always are. It's constitutional with them. Arabella seems in good form—tricksy as ever. Adorable Arabella!"

"Grinning idiot!" exclaimed the irreverent Geoffrey.

"She has a graceful habit of putting her foot in it which I cannot enough admire," pursued Philip, with one of his short sudden voiceless laughs. "She cheerfully informed me to-day that Viola had already seen Harry Lancaster, and thought him looking well. As Viola had heard of his arrival only this morning from my own lips, I was obliged to reprove Arabella for inaccuracy."

"What on earth put it into her head that Viola had seen him?" cried Geoffrey.

"Arabella's is not a head that I should like to have to account for," returned Philip, watching his wife's face furtively.

She was very pale.

"What had you been telling her, Viola?" cried her brother. "You know it won't do to let a woman like Mrs. Courtenay go about saying that you have seen Harry Lancaster before any one else had heard of his arrival; it doesn't sound well."

Philip's cat-like instinct found full indulgence this afternoon. Nearly, but not quite, Viola found herself a hundred times confronted with the alternative necessities of telling a falsehood and confessing where and how she had seen Harry. To admit it thus late in the day, implying the previous concealment, was distasteful. On the other hand, Viola thought it probable that Philip had *not* really believed Mrs. Courtenay to be inaccurate, and that he now amused himself by this slow torture of his wife, whose secret was no longer hers to tremble for or to keep.

"Upon my word, Viola," said Geoffrey, with an air of worldly wisdom worthy of his promised moustache, "I must take an opportunity skilfully to put Mrs. Courtenay right about that matter. Lancaster used rather to dangle after you before your marriage, and there's nothing too ridiculous for people to say. Ah, Triton, my boy, how are you? I say, that'll do now; down, good dog, down. Ila, you don't train him well. Your visitors will have to sacrifice

their best clothes as the price of your acquaintance. Sir Walter Raleigh got off easily in comparison!"

Geoffrey received no reply.

Standing before the door of her home, Viola was seized with a frantic impulse to turn from that great iron-bound portal and run away, no matter whither, so only that she need never again cross the threshold. A strong excitement held her; it seemed that her one chance of averting some hideous catastrophe lay in the desperate act of immediate flight; it was hers to decide upon it now, or to follow the fatal path to the end.

The hot sun pouring down upon the gravel and on the grey stone steps darted madness into her brain (or was it supreme wisdom?).

Why did God, she asked herself wildly, forbid His forsaken children, whom He had permitted to be degraded, to wash out stains and memories unendurable in the waters of death? Why did He force them to return to be tortured anew, with indignity heaped on indignity?

The sunshine was blinding; Viola put out her hand to steady herself against the stone balustrade, for she was faint and slightly swaying. She gave a terrified start.

Ah pitiful God! she *dared* not cross that threshold, for—or was she dreaming?—there was blood upon it!

Yes, *blood;* a stream which seemed to be oozing slowly under the door, stealthily moving forward to the steps till it dripped, dripped——

"By Jove! Philip, look-out—quick, lend us a hand—Viola has fainted!"

And so across the threshold, over the phantom blood-stream which she alone had seen upon the doorstep, the unconscious burden was carried into the house.

END OF VOL. II.

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